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(54) **METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLAYING GAMES ON A NETWORK**

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(58) **Field of Search** 463/26, 27, 11, 463/12, 13, 14, 15, 7, 30, 31, 35; 273/236, 237

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention is a game playing method and apparatus for automating games such as blackjack, poker, craps, roulette, baccarat and pai gow, wherein players may play continuously and asynchronously, and information related to advertised items can be exchanged between players and advertisers. In one embodiment, each instance of a game is likely unique from all other current game instances. The games do not require a manual dealer and in one embodiment, played in a gaming establishment using low cost gaming stations. The present invention may also, be used to play such games on the Internet or an interactive cable television network wherein a game controller communicates with players at network nodes in their homes and at their leisure since there is no game tempo requirement. During a game, advertising is selectively provided by comparing player personal information with a desired demographic profile. Player responses to advertising are used for evaluating advertising effectiveness. The invention is useful for test marketing of products, advertisements, and reduces advertising costs.

54 Claims, 14 Drawing Sheets

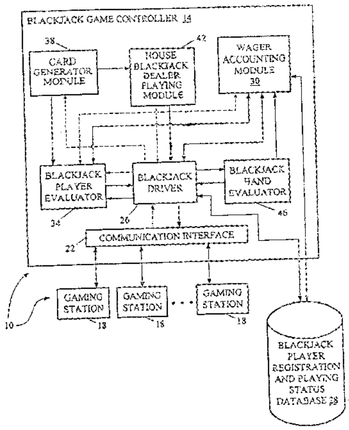
BLACKJACK GAME CONTROLLER 14
CARD GENERATOR MODULE
38
HOUSE BLACKJACK DEALER PLAYING MODULE
42
WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30
BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR
34
BLACKJACK DRIVER
26
BLACKJACK HAND EVALUATOR
46
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE
22
GAMING STATION
18
10
BLACKJACK PLAYER REGISTRATION AND PLAYING STATUS DATABASE 28

Exhibit A

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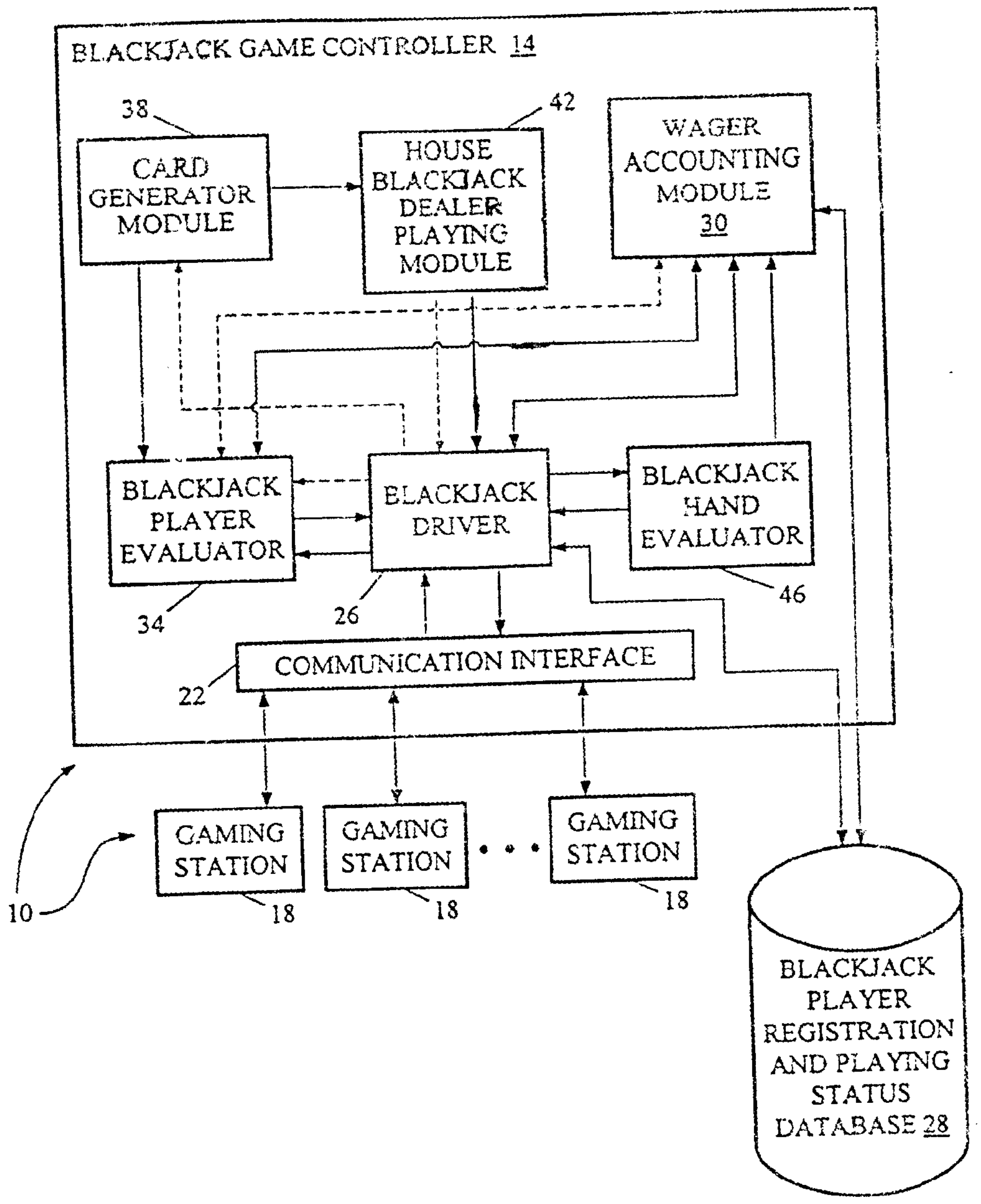
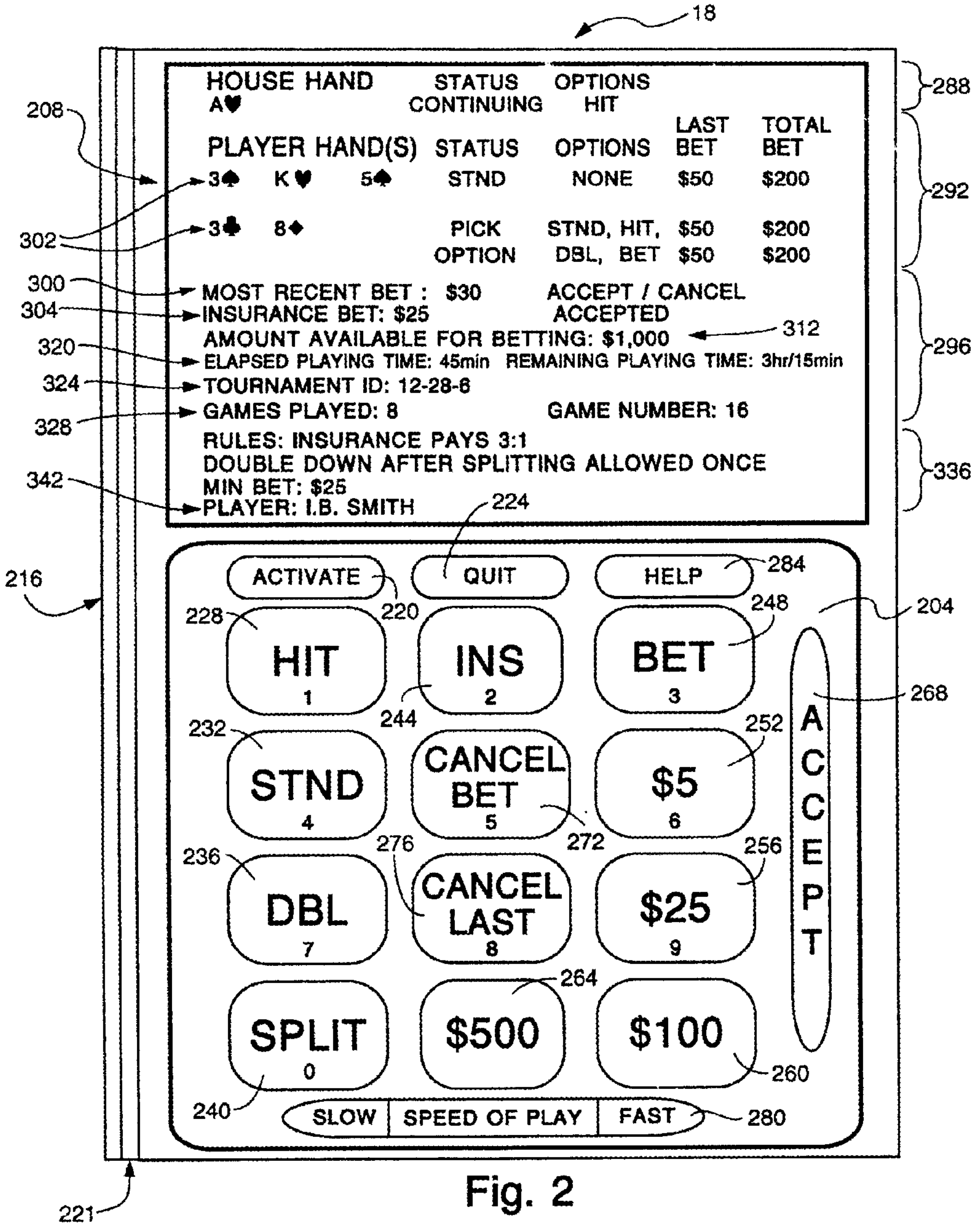

BLACKJACK GAME CONTROLLER 14
38
42
CARD GENERATOR MODULE
HOUSE BLACKJACK DEALER PLAYING MODULE
WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30
BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR
BLACKJACK DRIVER
BLACKJACK HAND EVALUATOR
46
34
26
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE
22
GAMING STATION
GAMING STATION
GAMING STATION
18
18
18
10
BLACKJACK PLAYER REGISTRATION AND PLAYING STATUS DATABASE 28

FIG. 1



18
HOUSE HAND STATUS OPTIONS
A♥ CONTINUING HIT
PLAYER HAND(S) STATUS OPTIONS LAST BET TOTAL BET
3♠ K♥ 5♠ STND NONE $50 $200
3♣ 8♦ PICK OPTION STND, HIT, DBL, BET $50 $200 $50 $200
MOST RECENT BET : $30 ACCEPT / CANCEL
INSURANCE BET: $25 ACCEPTED
AMOUNT AVAILABLE FOR BETTING: $1,000
ELAPSED PLAYING TIME: 45min REMAINING PLAYING TIME: 3hr/15min
TOURNAMENT ID: 12-28-6
GAMES PLAYED: 8 GAME NUMBER: 16
RULES: INSURANCE PAYS 3:1
DOUBLE DOWN AFTER SPLITTING ALLOWED ONCE
MIN BET: $25
PLAYER: I.B. SMITH
ACTIVATE
QUIT
HELP
HIT 1
INS 2
BET 3
STND 4
CANCEL BET 5
$5 6
DBL 7
CANCEL LAST 8
$25 9
SPLIT 0
$500
$100
ACCEPT
SLOW SPEED OF PLAY FAST
288
292
296
336
208
302
300
304
312
320
324
328
342
224
216
284
220
204
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260
240
280
221

Fig. 2

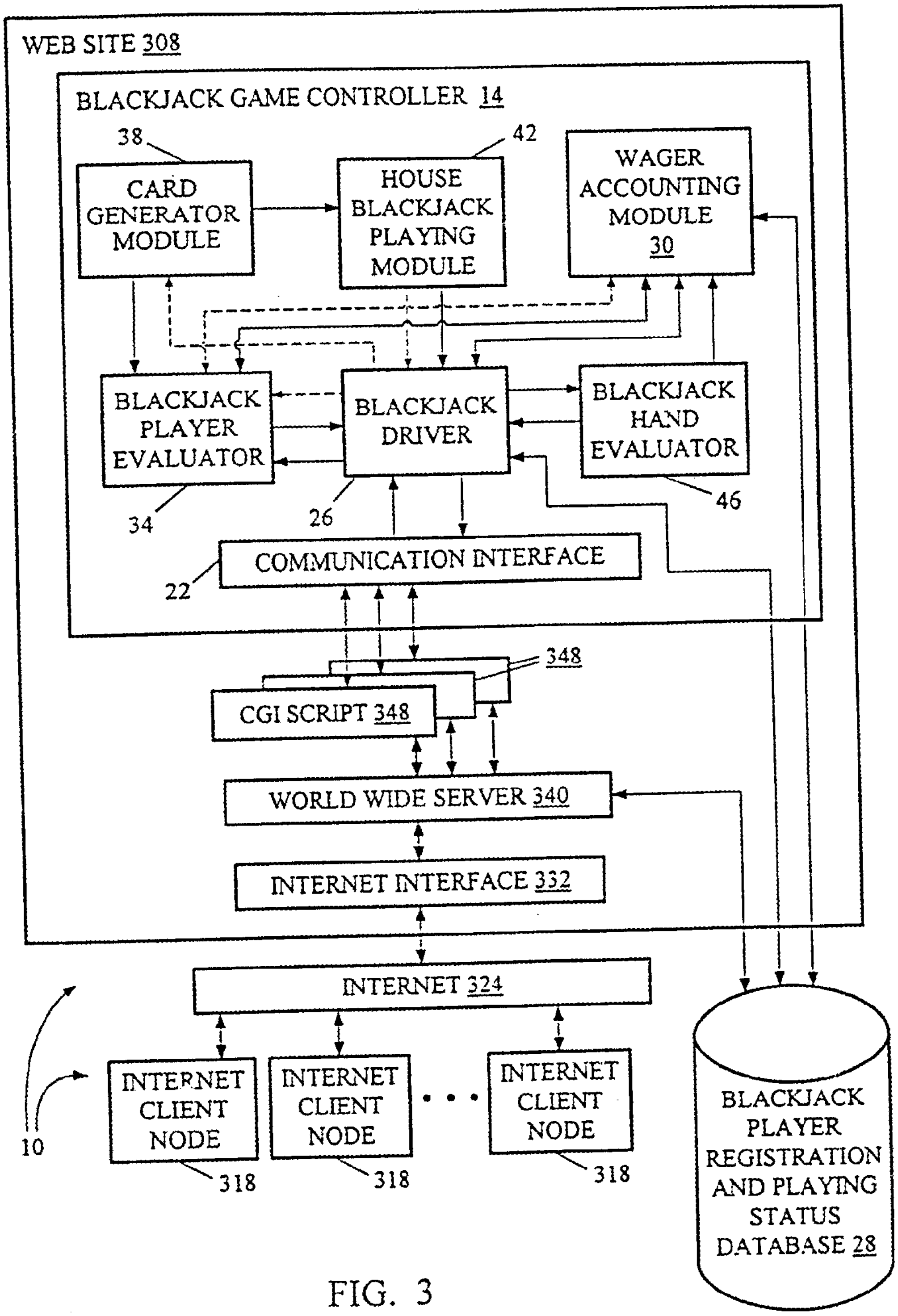
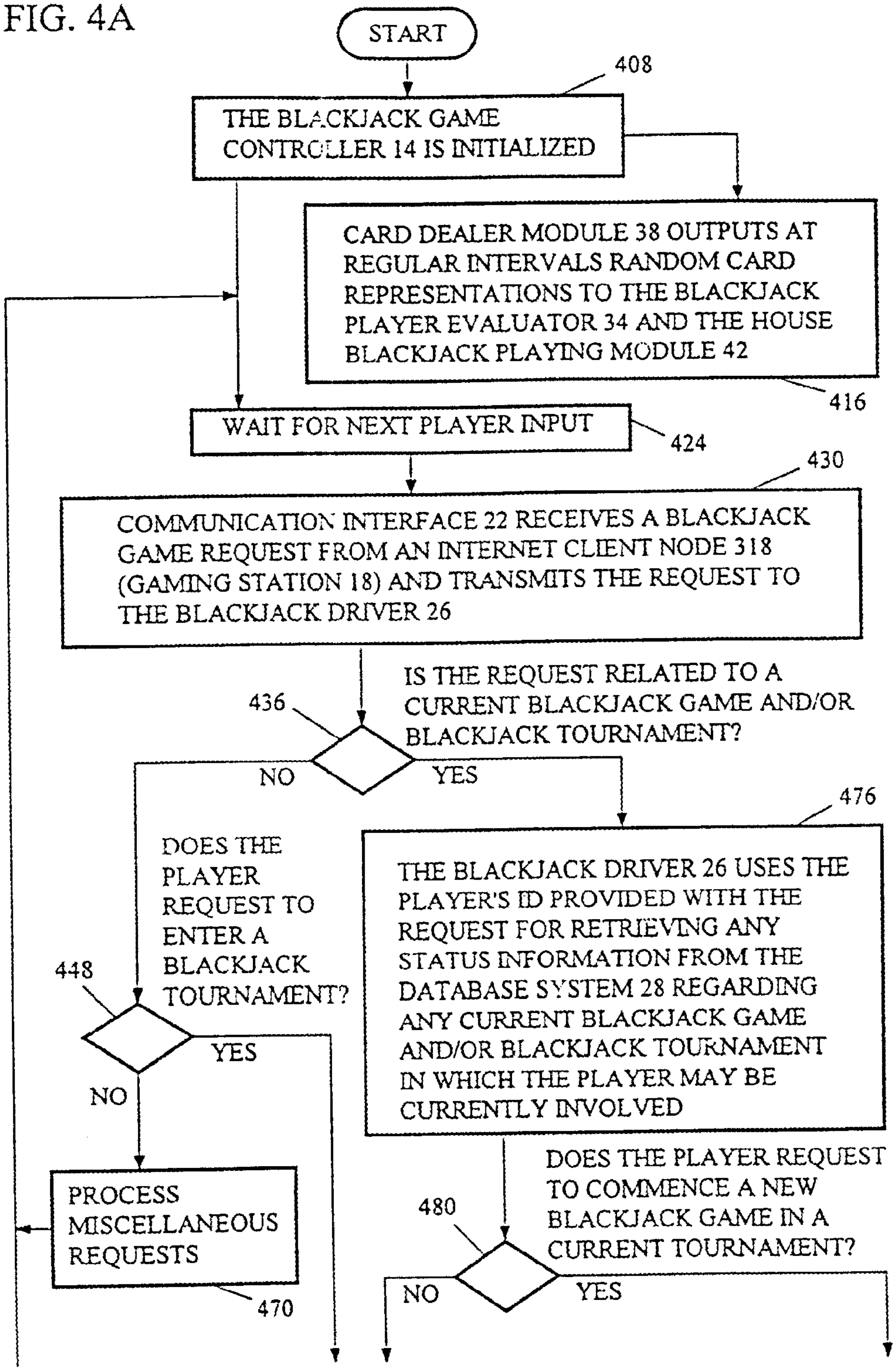

WEB SITE 308
BLACKJACK GAME CONTROLLER 14
38
42
CARD GENERATOR MODULE
HOUSE BLACKJACK PLAYING MODULE
WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30
BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR
BLACKJACK DRIVER
BLACKJACK HAND EVALUATOR
34
26
46
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE
22
348
CGI SCRIPT 348
WORLD WIDE SERVER 340
INTERNET INTERFACE 332
INTERNET 324
INTERNET CLIENT NODE
INTERNET CLIENT NODE
INTERNET CLIENT NODE
10
318
318
318
BLACKJACK PLAYER REGISTRATION AND PLAYING STATUS DATABASE 28

FIG. 3

FIG. 4A


START
408
THE BLACKJACK GAME CONTROLLER 14 IS INITIALIZED
CARD DEALER MODULE 38 OUTPUTS AT REGULAR INTERVALS RANDOM CARD REPRESENTATIONS TO THE BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR 34 AND THE HOUSE BLACKJACK PLAYING MODULE 42
416
WAIT FOR NEXT PLAYER INPUT
424
430
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE 22 RECEIVES A BLACKJACK GAME REQUEST FROM AN INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318 (GAMING STATION 18) AND TRANSMITS THE REQUEST TO THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26
436
IS THE REQUEST RELATED TO A CURRENT BLACKJACK GAME AND/OR BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT?
NO
YES
476
DOES THE PLAYER REQUEST TO ENTER A BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT?
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 USES THE PLAYER'S ID PROVIDED WITH THE REQUEST FOR RETRIEVING ANY STATUS INFORMATION FROM THE DATABASE SYSTEM 28 REGARDING ANY CURRENT BLACKJACK GAME AND/OR BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT IN WHICH THE PLAYER MAY BE CURRENTLY INVOLVED
448
YES
NO
PROCESS MISCELLANEOUS REQUESTS
470
DOES THE PLAYER REQUEST TO COMMENCE A NEW BLACKJACK GAME IN A CURRENT TOURNAMENT?
480
NO
YES

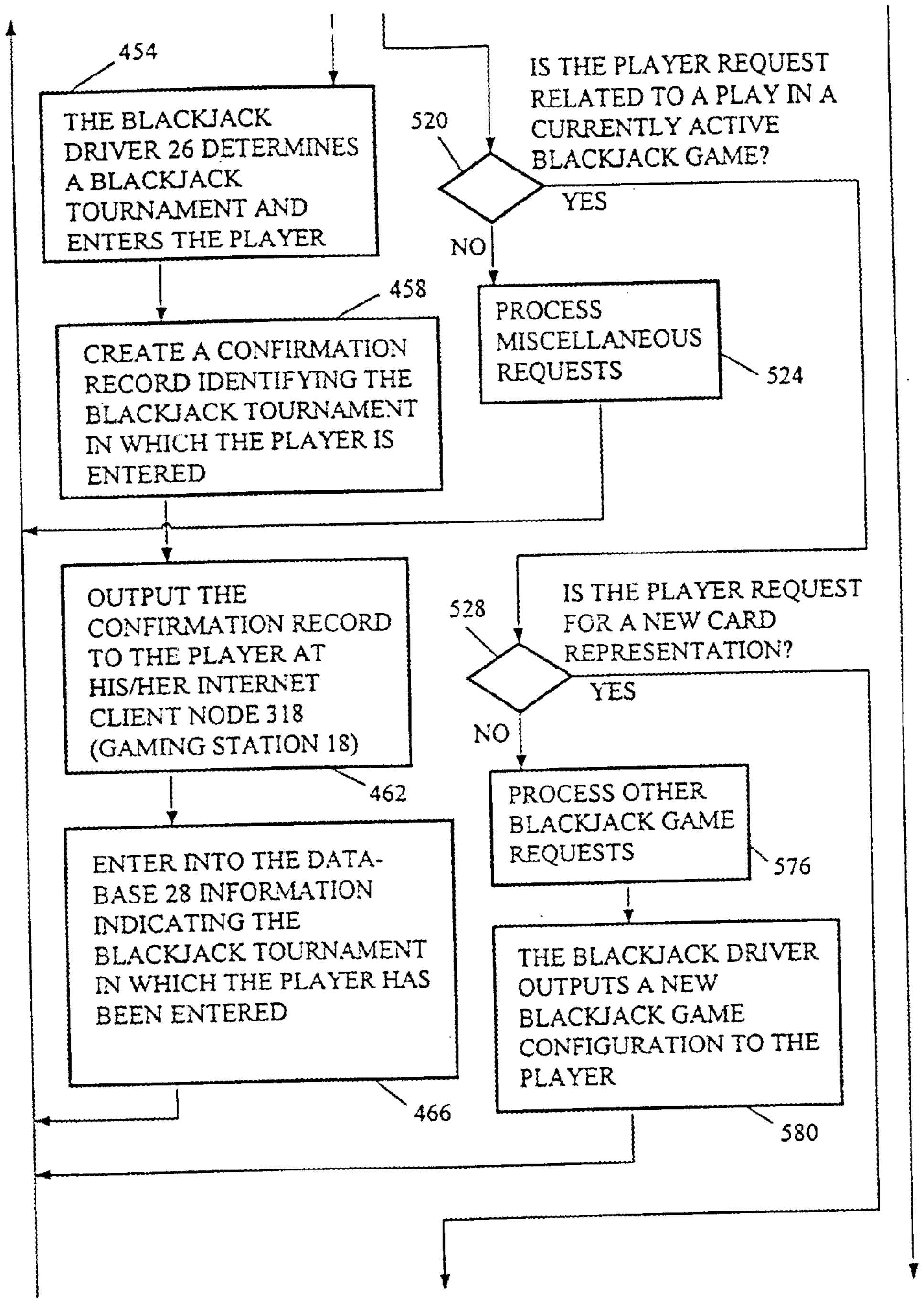

454
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 DETERMINES A BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT AND ENTERS THE PLAYER
520
IS THE PLAYER REQUEST RELATED TO A PLAY IN A CURRENTLY ACTIVE BLACKJACK GAME?
YES
NO
458
CREATE A CONFIRMATION RECORD IDENTIFYING THE BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT IN WHICH THE PLAYER IS ENTERED
PROCESS MISCELLANEOUS REQUESTS
524
OUTPUT THE CONFIRMATION RECORD TO THE PLAYER AT HIS/HER INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318 (GAMING STATION 18)
462
528
IS THE PLAYER REQUEST FOR A NEW CARD REPRESENTATION?
YES
NO
PROCESS OTHER BLACKJACK GAME REQUESTS
576
ENTER INTO THE DATA-BASE 28 INFORMATION INDICATING THE BLACKJACK TOURNAMENT IN WHICH THE PLAYER HAS BEEN ENTERED
466
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER OUTPUTS A NEW BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION TO THE PLAYER
580

FIG. 4B

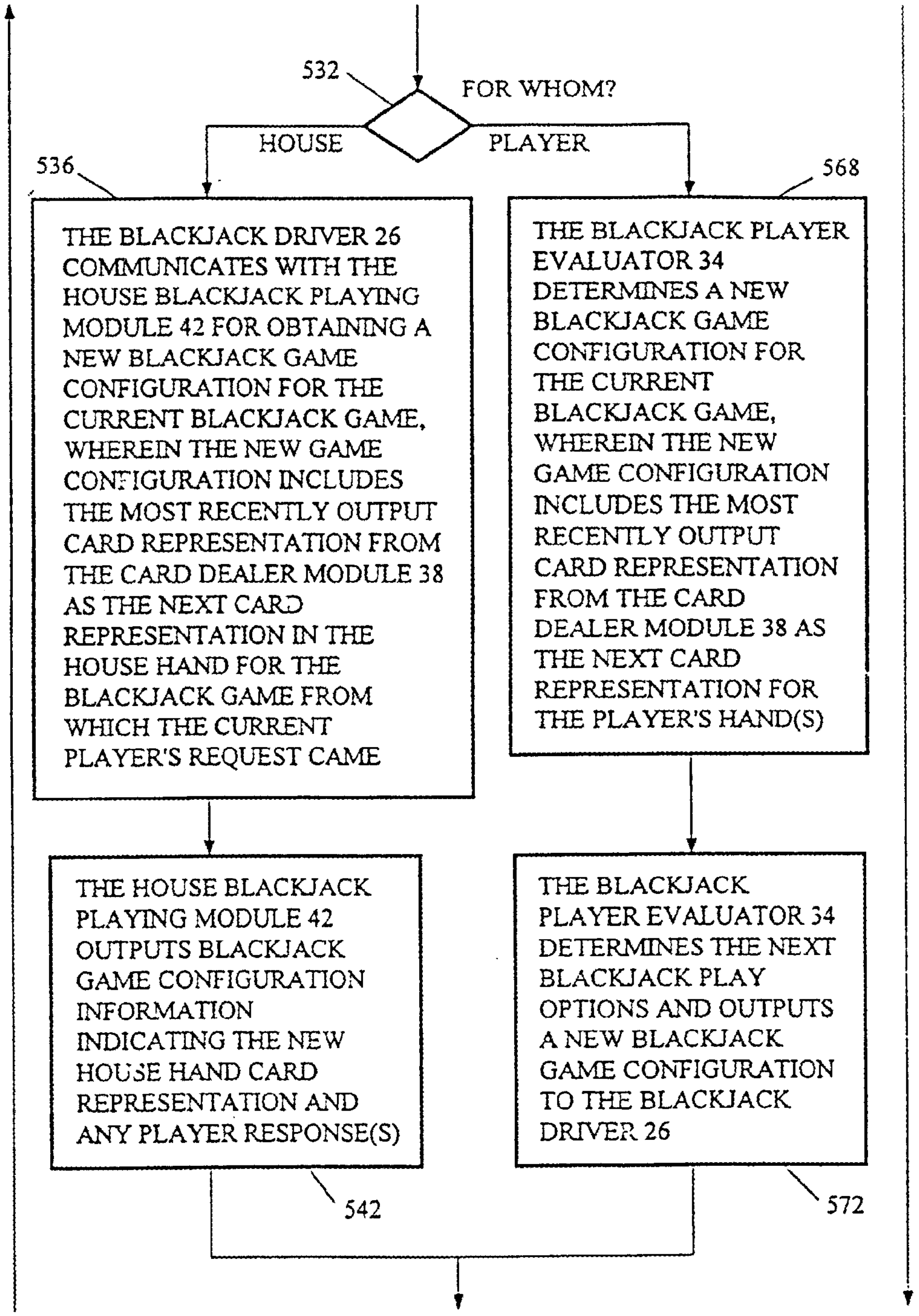
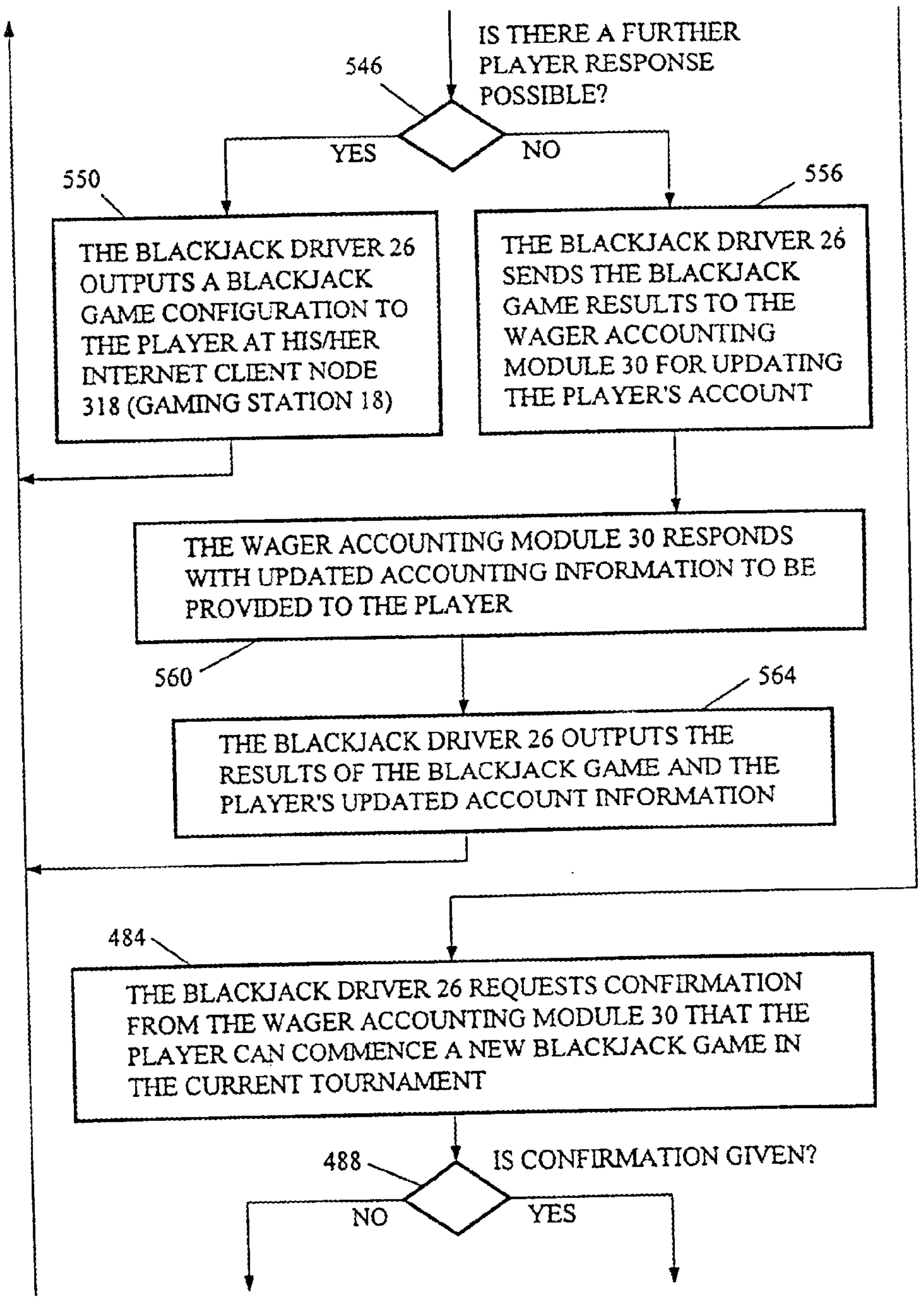

532
FOR WHOM?
HOUSE
PLAYER
536
568
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 COMMUNICATES WITH THE HOUSE BLACKJACK PLAYING MODULE 42 FOR OBTAINING A NEW BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION FOR THE CURRENT BLACKJACK GAME, WHEREIN THE NEW GAME CONFIGURATION INCLUDES THE MOST RECENTLY OUTPUT CARD REPRESENTATION FROM THE CARD DEALER MODULE 38 AS THE NEXT CARD REPRESENTATION IN THE HOUSE HAND FOR THE BLACKJACK GAME FROM WHICH THE CURRENT PLAYER'S REQUEST CAME
THE BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR 34 DETERMINES A NEW BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION FOR THE CURRENT BLACKJACK GAME, WHEREIN THE NEW GAME CONFIGURATION INCLUDES THE MOST RECENTLY OUTPUT CARD REPRESENTATION FROM THE CARD DEALER MODULE 38 AS THE NEXT CARD REPRESENTATION FOR THE PLAYER'S HAND(S)
THE HOUSE BLACKJACK PLAYING MODULE 42 OUTPUTS BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION INFORMATION INDICATING THE NEW HOUSE HAND CARD REPRESENTATION AND ANY PLAYER RESPONSE(S)
THE BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR 34 DETERMINES THE NEXT BLACKJACK PLAY OPTIONS AND OUTPUTS A NEW BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION TO THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26
542
572

FIG. 4C



IS THERE A FURTHER PLAYER RESPONSE POSSIBLE?
546
YES
NO
550
556
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 OUTPUTS A BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION TO THE PLAYER AT HIS/HER INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318 (GAMING STATION 18)
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 SENDS THE BLACKJACK GAME RESULTS TO THE WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30 FOR UPDATING THE PLAYER'S ACCOUNT
THE WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30 RESPONDS WITH UPDATED ACCOUNTING INFORMATION TO BE PROVIDED TO THE PLAYER
560
564
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 OUTPUTS THE RESULTS OF THE BLACKJACK GAME AND THE PLAYER'S UPDATED ACCOUNT INFORMATION
484
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 REQUESTS CONFIRMATION FROM THE WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30 THAT THE PLAYER CAN COMMENCE A NEW BLACKJACK GAME IN THE CURRENT TOURNAMENT
488
IS CONFIRMATION GIVEN?
NO
YES

FIG. 4D

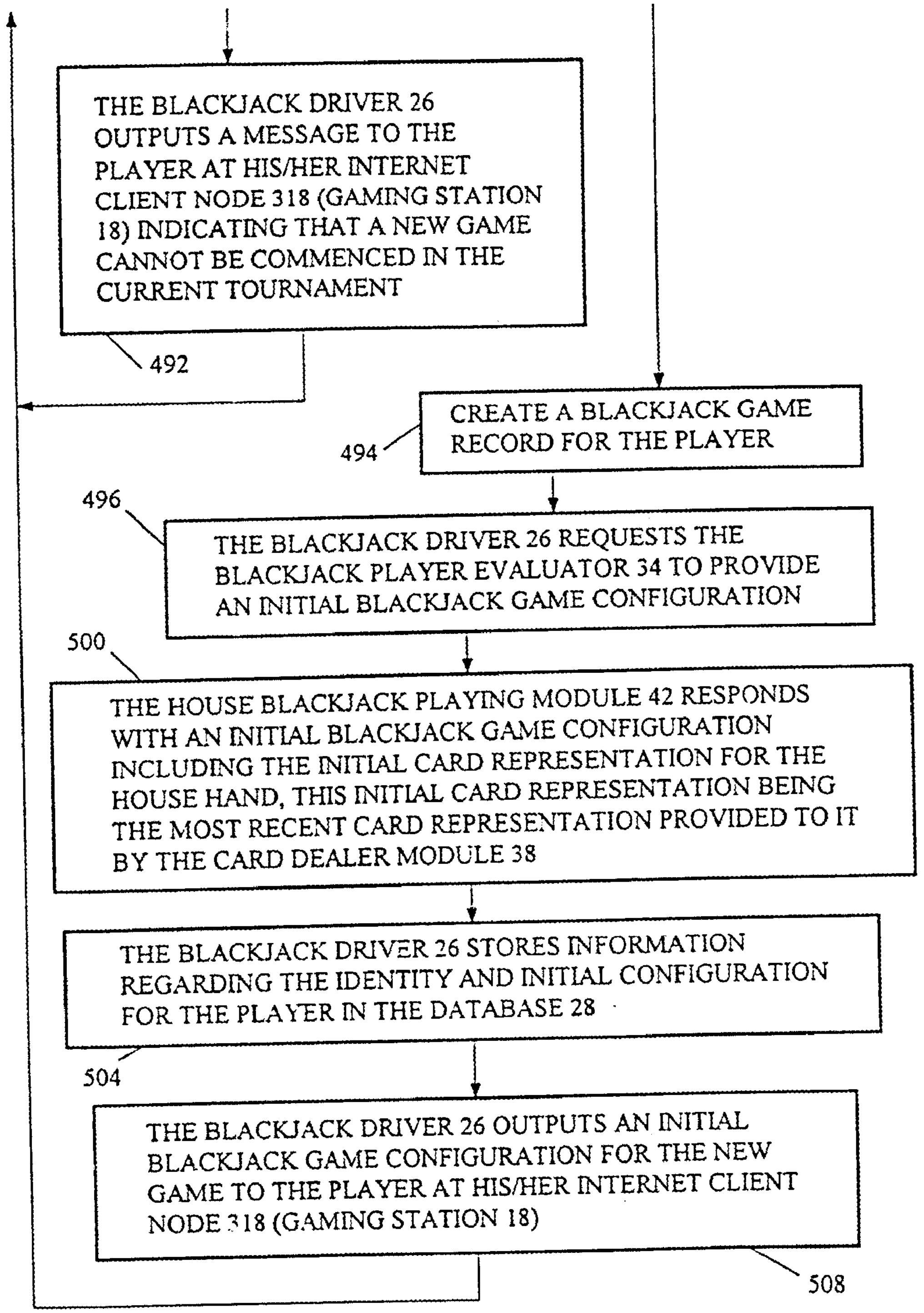

THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 OUTPUTS A MESSAGE TO THE PLAYER AT HIS/HER INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318 (GAMING STATION 18) INDICATING THAT A NEW GAME CANNOT BE COMMENCED IN THE CURRENT TOURNAMENT
492
CREATE A BLACKJACK GAME RECORD FOR THE PLAYER
494
496
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 REQUESTS THE BLACKJACK PLAYER EVALUATOR 34 TO PROVIDE AN INITIAL BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION
500
THE HOUSE BLACKJACK PLAYING MODULE 42 RESPONDS WITH AN INITIAL BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION INCLUDING THE INITIAL CARD REPRESENTATION FOR THE HOUSE HAND, THIS INITIAL CARD REPRESENTATION BEING THE MOST RECENT CARD REPRESENTATION PROVIDED TO IT BY THE CARD DEALER MODULE 38
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 STORES INFORMATION REGARDING THE IDENTITY AND INITIAL CONFIGURATION FOR THE PLAYER IN THE DATABASE 28
504
THE BLACKJACK DRIVER 26 OUTPUTS AN INITIAL BLACKJACK GAME CONFIGURATION FOR THE NEW GAME TO THE PLAYER AT HIS/HER INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318 (GAMING STATION 18)
508

FIG. 4E

606

604

	VALUES OF CARDS FROM CARD SEQUENCE OUPUT BY THE CARD DEALER MODULE 38 →	3	5	7	2	9	8	10	10
BLACK JACK GAME 610	PLAYER HAND EVALUATION	3		10	—	19			
	HOUSE HAND EVALUATION		5				13	23	
BLACK JACK GAME 614	PLAYER HAND EVALUATION		5			—	13	—	23
	HOUSE HAND EVALUATION			—	2				
BLACK JACK GAME 620	PLAYER HAND EVALUATION			7		16			
	HOUSE HAND EVALUATION				2		10	20	
BLACK JACK GAME 626	PLAYER HAND EVALUATION					9		19	
	HOUSE HAND EVALUATION						8		18

FIG. 5

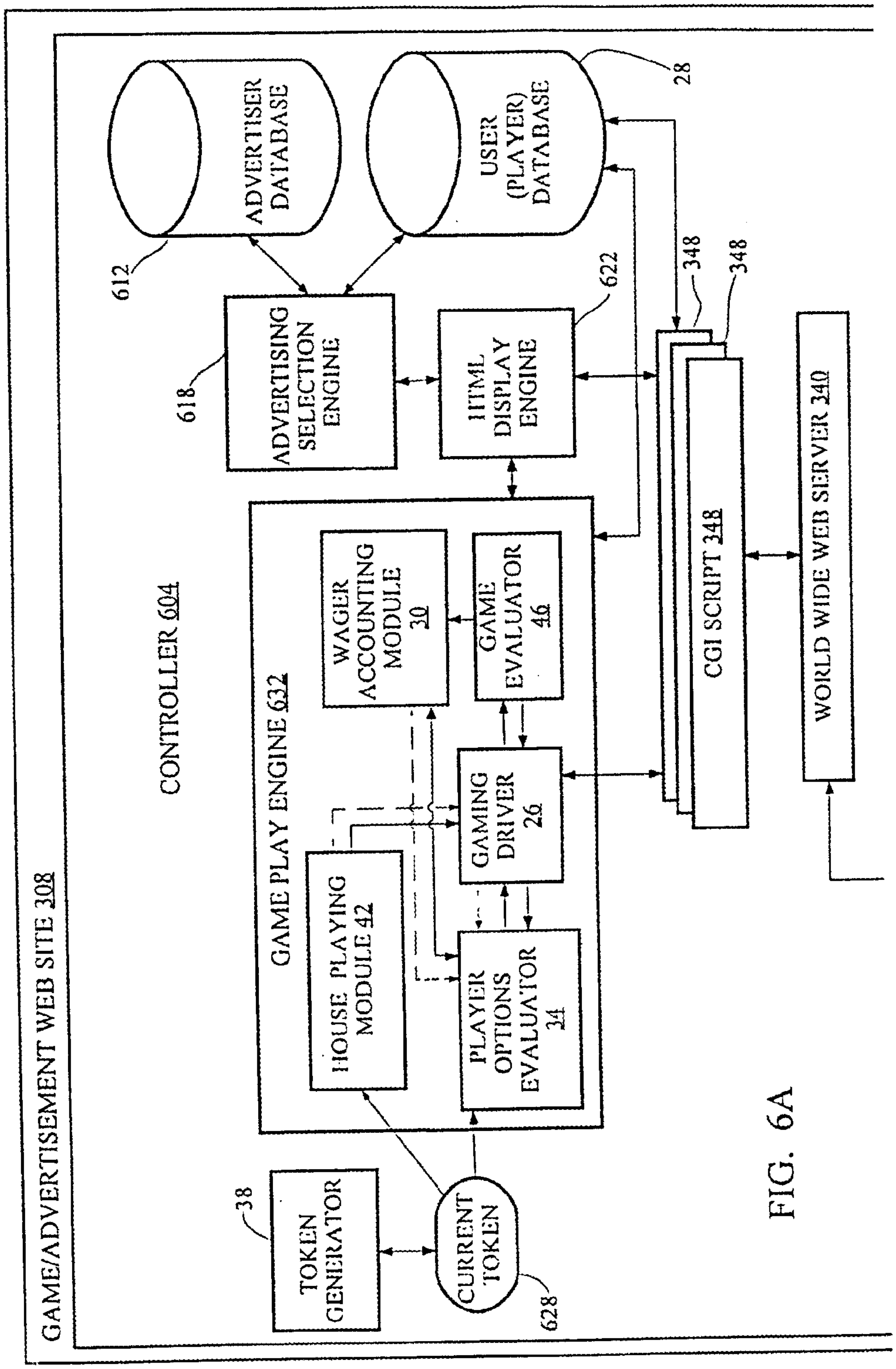
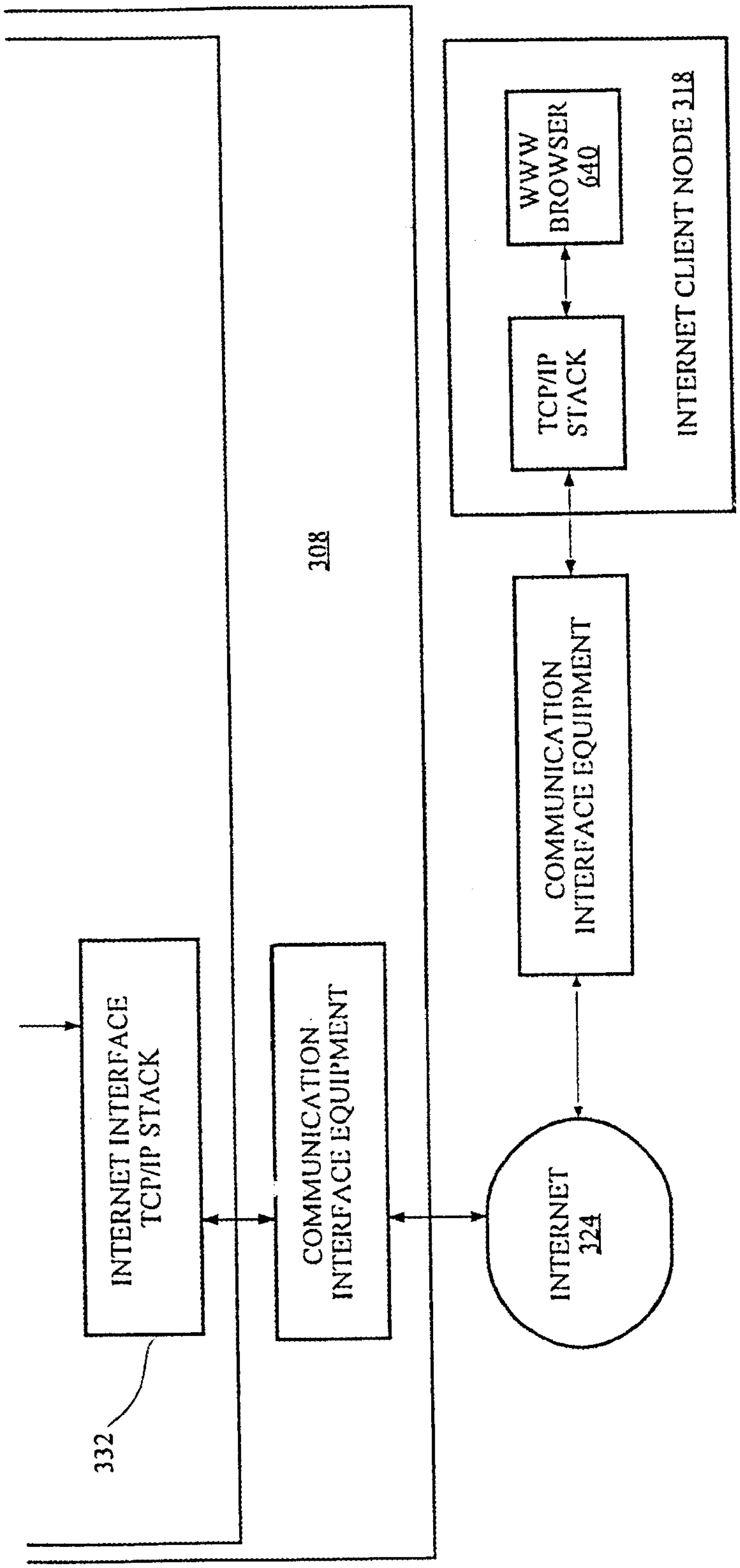

GAME/ADVERTISEMENT WEB SITE 308
CONTROLLER 604
ADVERTISER DATABASE
612
USER (PLAYER) DATABASE
28
ADVERTISING SELECTION ENGINE
618
HTML DISPLAY ENGINE
622
348
348
CGI SCRIPT 348
WORLD WIDE WEB SERVER 340
GAME PLAY ENGINE 632
WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30
GAME EVALUATOR 46
GAMING DRIVER 26
HOUSE PLAYING MODULE 42
PLAYER OPTIONS EVALUATOR 34
TOKEN GENERATOR
38
CURRENT TOKEN
628

FIG. 6A



WWW BROWSER 640
TCP/IP STACK
INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318
308
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE EQUIPMENT
INTERNET INTERFACE TCP/IP STACK
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE EQUIPMENT
INTERNET 324
332

FIG. 6B

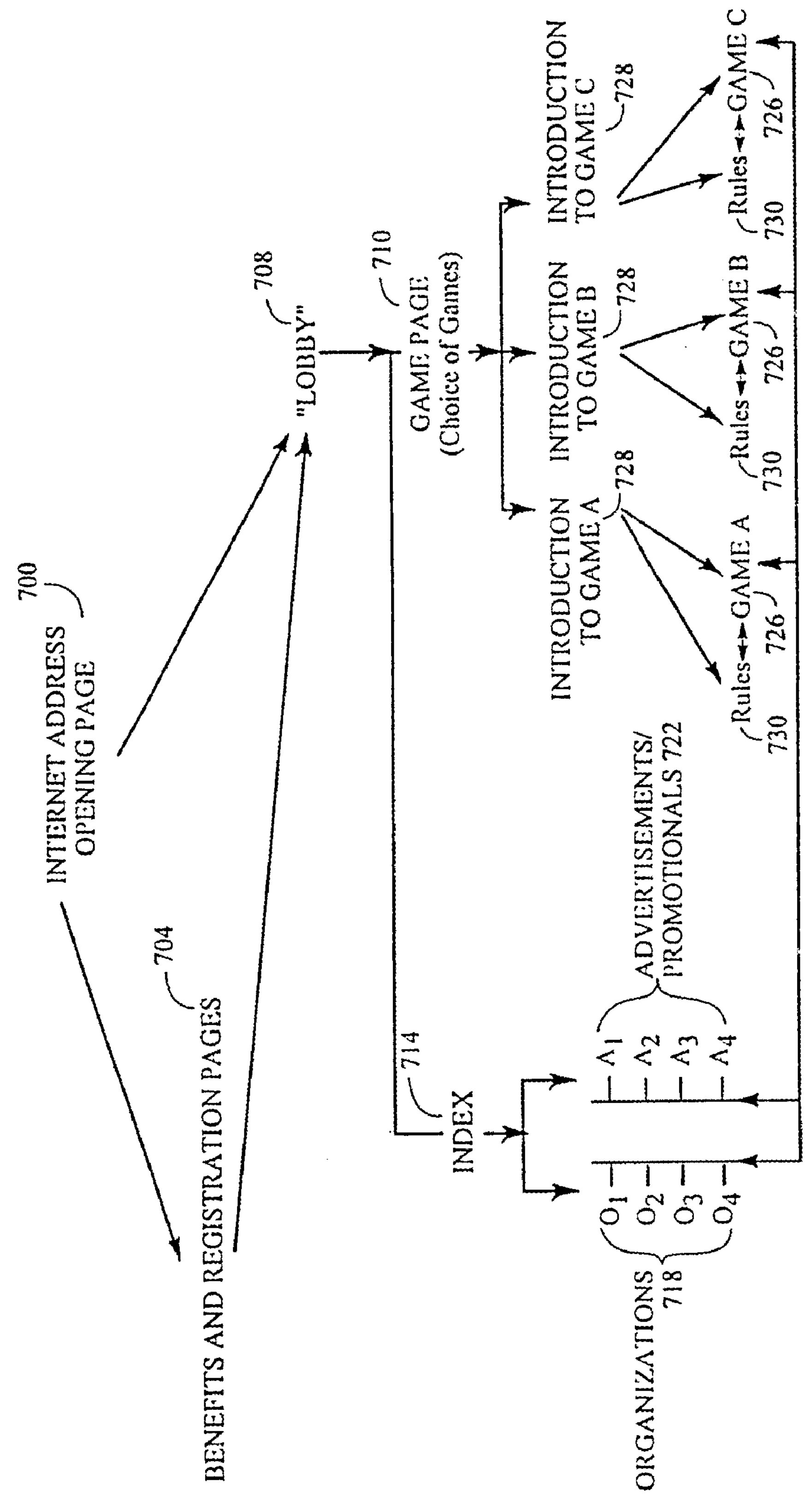

INTERNET ADDRESS OPENING PAGE
700
BENEFITS AND REGISTRATION PAGES
704
"LOBBY"
708
GAME PAGE (Choice of Games)
710
INDEX
714
INTRODUCTION TO GAME A
INTRODUCTION TO GAME B
INTRODUCTION TO GAME C
728
Rules
GAME A
GAME B
GAME C
726
730
ORGANIZATIONS 718
O1
O2
O3
O4
A1
A2
A3
A4
ADVERTISEMENTS/ PROMOTIONALS 722

FIG. 7

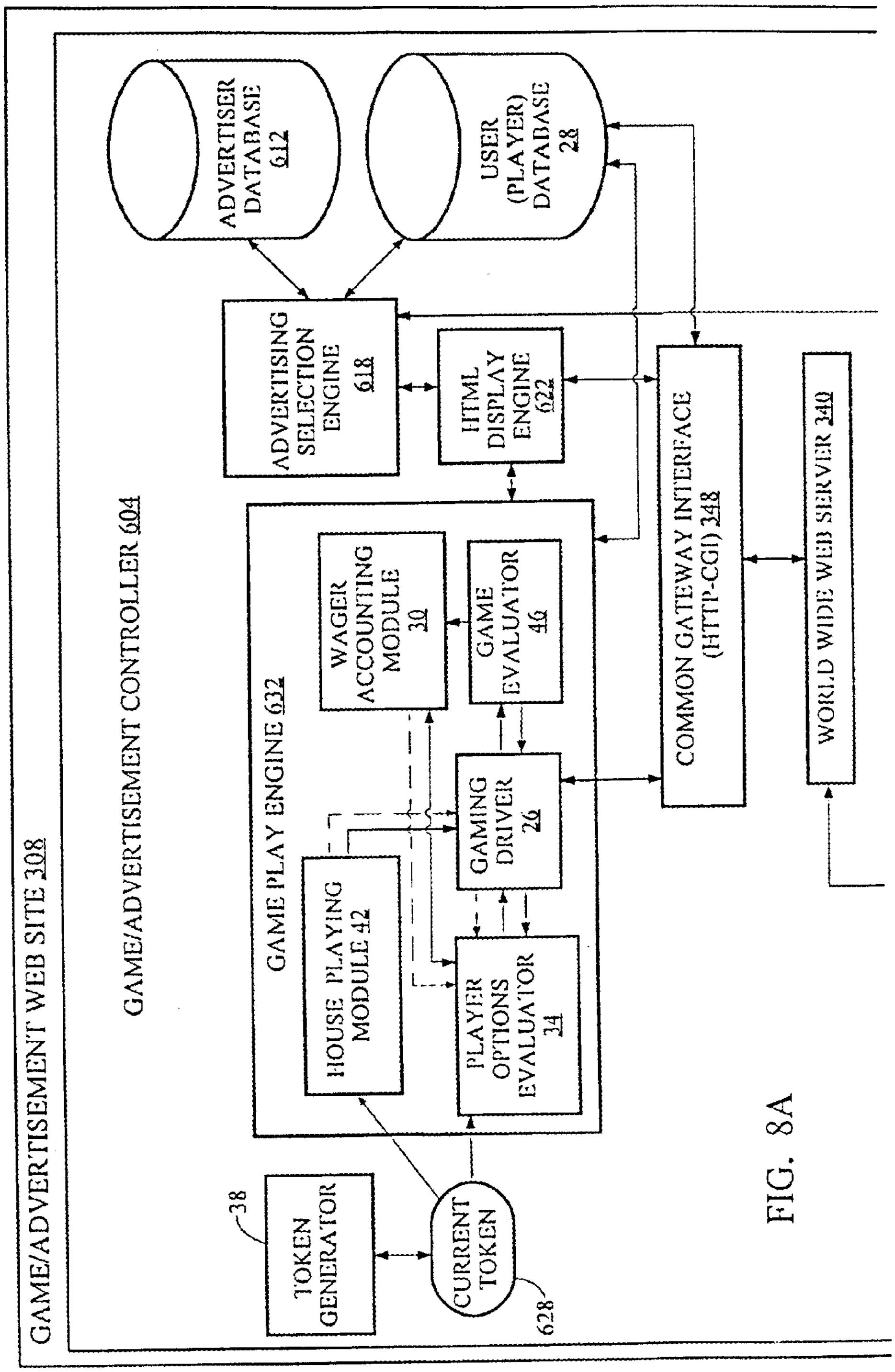
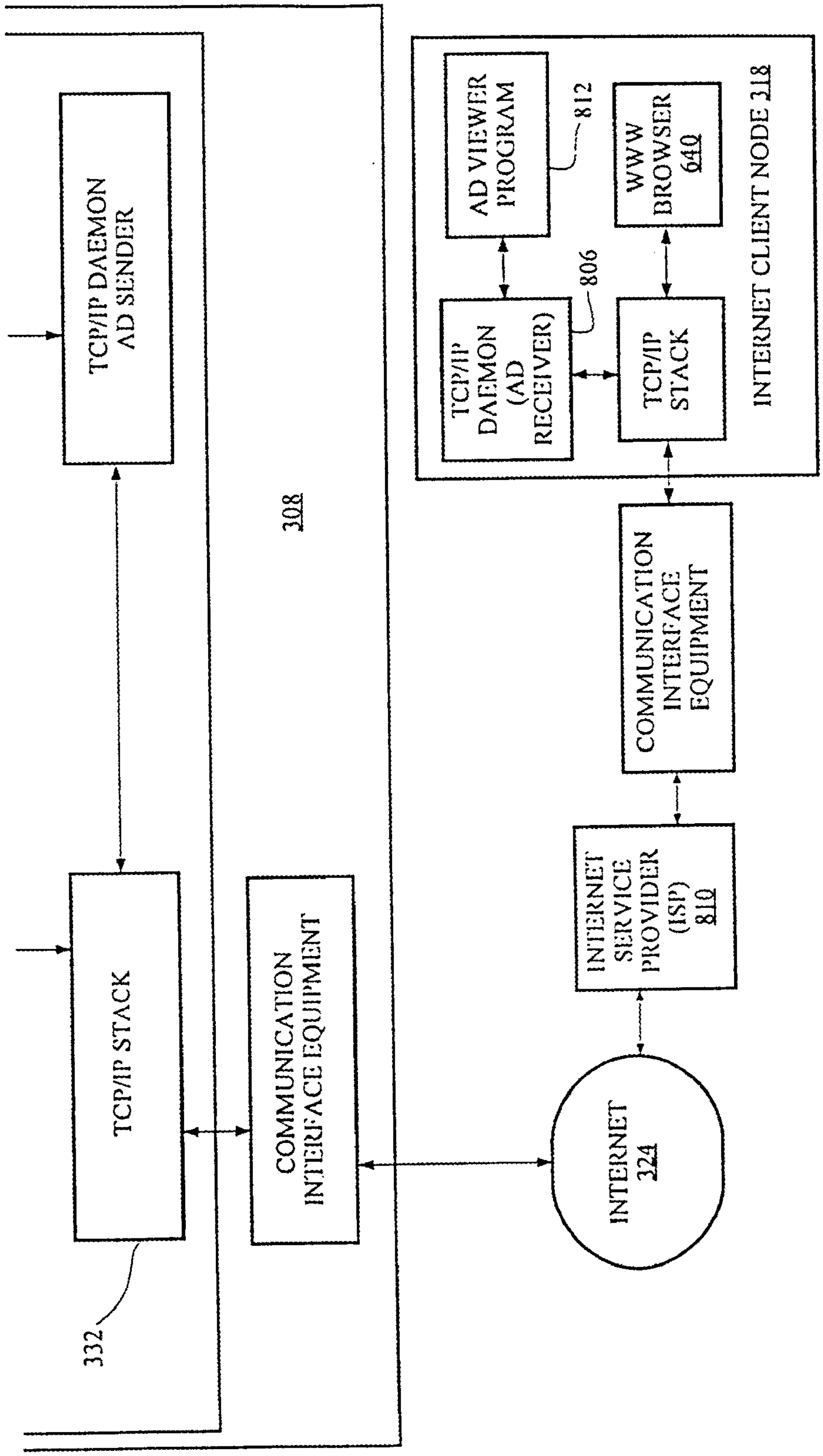

GAME/ADVERTISEMENT WEB SITE 308
GAME/ADVERTISEMENT CONTROLLER 604
ADVERTISER DATABASE 612
USER (PLAYER) DATABASE 28
ADVERTISING SELECTION ENGINE 618
HTML DISPLAY ENGINE 622
GAME PLAY ENGINE 632
WAGER ACCOUNTING MODULE 30
GAME EVALUATOR 46
GAMING DRIVER 26
HOUSE PLAYING MODULE 42
PLAYER OPTIONS EVALUATOR 34
COMMON GATEWAY INTERFACE (HTTP-CGI) 348
WORLD WIDE WEB SERVER 340
TOKEN GENERATOR
38
CURRENT TOKEN
628

FIG. 8A



TCP/IP DAEMON AD SENDER
TCP/IP STACK
332
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE EQUIPMENT
308
AD VIEWER PROGRAM
812
WWW BROWSER 640
806
TCP/IP DAEMON (AD RECEIVER)
TCP/IP STACK
INTERNET CLIENT NODE 318
COMMUNICATION INTERFACE EQUIPMENT
INTERNET SERVICE PROVIDER (ISP) 810
INTERNET 324

FIG. 8B

METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR PLAYING GAMES ON A NETWORK

RELATED APPLICATIONS

The present patent application is a continuation of prior U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/140,979 filed Aug. 27,1998 (now U.S. Pat. No. 6,264,560), which: (a) claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/058,006 filed Aug. 28, 1997, and (b) is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/105,401 filed Jun. 26, 1998 (now U.S. Pat. No. 6,183,366), which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 08/759,895 filed Dec. 3, 1996 (now U.S. Pat. No. 5,823,879) which claims the benefit of both U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/010,361 filed Jan. 19, 1996 and U.S. Provisional Patent Application No. 60/010,703 filed Jan. 26, 1996. The entire disclosure of the prior applications are considered to be part of the disclosure of the present application and are incorporated herein be reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is related to a method and apparatus for automating the playing games such as blackjack in, e.g., a game tournament context so that they can be played continuously and asynchronously by a potentially large plurality of players substantially, and wherein information related to goods and services for sale can be exchanged between players and sponsors of advertisements presented during the playing of a game.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The cost effective automation of playing certain games, like blackjack, has been difficult due to the fact that these games typically require a dealer and only a relatively small number of players may play the game with a single dealer. However, with the popularity of local and wide-area data communication networks, it is desirable to have an automated gaming system for games such as blackjack wherein large numbers of players may cost-effectively and efficiently play such games.

Furthermore, it has been difficult to cost-effectively provide a network gaming system on such networks as the Internet in that gaming restrictions prohibit wagering and ante fees in most contexts except such situations as local area networks within a casino. However, since many players have an interest in playing casino-type games, it would also be desirable to have a way to benefit from interests in such games. Accordingly, it would be desirable to have a system that utilized a gaming context as a vehicle for delivering product and/or service information to users of a network such as the Internet. In particular, it would be desirable to have a data processing system that provided a large number of players with the ability to substantially asynchronously play casino-style games on the Internet for prizes at a reduced risk or at substantially no risk, wherein the data processing system coordinated the presentation of products and/or services from sponsors of the games so that there is a coordinated, interactive exchange of information between players and sponsors regarding advertisements, samples, prizes and questionnaires related to sponsor -products and/or services.

Accordingly, since the present invention, as described in the sections hereinbelow, addresses the above-discussed problems within the context of playing blackjack, an overview of this particular game is provided so that the novelty

and various related aspects of the present invention may be more fully appreciated.

Description of Blackjack

The card game of blackjack is a game of chance played between a designated player known as a "dealer" and one or more other players. Basically, each player plays against the dealer in the sense that each player attempts to achieve a collection or hand of cards having a total score for the hand closer to the value 21 than the score of the hand of the dealer. However, if a player's card hand goes over 21, the player may lose any wagers bet on the hand regardless of the value of the card hand of the dealer.

In further detail, blackjack is typically played with one or more standard playing card decks wherein each card has a value. In particular, each of the face cards has the value of 10, and non-face card has a value identical to the numerical value as indicated on the card, except for aces. That is, for aces a value may be assigned of either 1 or 11, depending on which value a player deems most beneficial to his/her hand.

In one conventional method for playing blackjack, at the commencement of a blackjack hand, each player initially is provided with two cards and the dealer also receives two cards. Typically, one of the dealer's cards is dealt with the value of the card showing whereas the other card is dealt with the value of the card hidden. However, variations on when the dealer receives his/her cards may depend on the blackjack gaming rules where blackjack is being played but, in any case, one of the dealer's cards must be face-up before the players exercise various wagering options beyond an initial ante.

After a player has reviewed his/her cards, the player may request one or more additional cards in an attempt to get: (a) a value for a card hand that will be greater than the hand the dealer will have, and (b) a value for the card hand that is less than or equal to 21. Further, a player may under certain circumstances, as will be described below, simultaneously play more than one hand of cards against the dealer's cards. However, in requesting such additional cards, a player runs the risk of "busting" each hand played wherein the player loses his/her wager(s) on a card hand by adding cards to the hand until a value exceeding 21 occurs. Further note that such busting of a hand occurs regardless of whether or not the dealer has a card hand value of less than or equal to 21.

Note that after each player has ceased to request further cards (i.e., each player "stands" on his cards), the dealer either takes one or more further cards (i.e., "hits") according to predetermined blackjack rules as established, for example, by the gaming establishment where the blackjack game is being conducted. In general, the dealer must take additional cards if his/her current card count total is less than 17 and the dealer must decline further cards if the dealer's hand has a value of 17 or more. However, there are various rules regarding whether a dealer may stand or hit when the card count total is a "soft 17." That is, one of the dealer's cards is an ace (and therefore may have a value of 1 or 11) and one of the values for the dealer's hand is 17. For example, the dealer may be required to take a hit on a soft 17.

Since a hit(s) taken by the dealer is performed after all players have exercised their wagering options, the final numerical value of the dealer'hand is then compared to the final numerical value of each of the player's hand(s) to determine the winning and losing wagers. Note that if the dealer's hand exceeds the value of 21, then any player that has not busted wins the wagers for their hand(s) regardless of the hand's total value. Alternatively, if the dealer's card hand is less or equal to 21, then it is compared with each of the player's card hand(s) and in each comparison the card hand with the closest total value to 21 without exceeding 21 wins. Of course, ties are possible. In such cases (called a "push"), the player's wager(s) on his/her card hand are returned.

It is typical in blackjack to have at least three additional player options depending on the circumstances of play. A first such option is known as "doubling down" wherein if the player's first two cards have a value within a predetermined range (e.g., 10 or 11), then the player may double his or her wager and-once dealt a single additional card, the total of the three card hand becomes the value for the player's hand. Alternatively, another, option is that of "splitting pairs" wherein if the player's first two cards are identical with the exception of suit (i.e., a pair), then the pair may be split so that two card hands are created with one card of the pair in each hand. Thus, the player must wager on each of the hands at least the initial wagering or ante amount. Subsequently, a second card and any subsequent successive cards are dealt to each of the separate hands as the player requests and the results of both hands are compared to the dealer's hand, assuming neither the dealer nor either of the player's two hands busts.

In a third option, played immediately after each player has been dealt their first two cards and the dealer has been dealt at least a first card, a player may request "insurance" under the circumstances where the dealer's single face-up card is an ace. In this circumstance, the player is betting that the dealer has blackjack (i.e., a card value total of 21). If the dealer does not have blackjack, then the insurance bet is forfeited and the player plays his/her blackjack hand as if the insurance bet were never made. Note that the player can typically wager an insurance bet of one-half of the amount of his/her initial blackjack wager or ante and if the dealer has blackjack, then the dealer (or the gaming establishment) pays the player double or triple his/her insurance bet.

Further note that options for splitting pairs and doubling down may interact with one another according to certain pre-established gaming establishment rules wherein, for example, a player may double down on one or more of his/her split hands.

Additionally, there are blackjack tournaments having tournament entrants that compete against each other for tournament prizes. In such tournaments each entrant has a fixed initial number of points that can be wagered in a pre-established number of tournament blackjack games to be played. Accordingly, the player having the highest number of points at the end of the tournament wins the tournament. Note that in such tournaments, there may be specific guidelines established at the beginning of the tournament for varying the blackjack gaming rules between tournament games. For example, rules may vary on when a player may split pairs repeatedly during the same blackjack game. Also, double down rules may vary so that, for example, after a splitting of pairs, a player may be allowed to double down on any two cards or, alternatively, an additional wager of less than the initial. wager may be acceptable when a player requests to double down.

However, in all known variations of blackjack, players are only allowed to enter a blackjack game at the completion of a previous game and, further, there is a relatively small number of players that can play blackjack at a dealer's station simultaneously. Accordingly, it is desirable to provide a system for playing blackjack wherein potentially a very larger number of players can play blackjack simultaneously from a single dealer station and wherein players can commence playing blackjack at their own discretion without waiting for a previous blackjack game to complete.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is a computerized interactive advertising system (i.e., method and apparatus) for exchanging information regarding goods and/or services between a first population of users (hereinafter also known as "players" or "users") and a second population of users (hereinafter also known as "sponsors" or "advertisers"). In particular, the sponsors or advertisers may present information related to goods and/or services to the players using the present invention and the players may view this information while, for example, interacting with the present invention for playing a game such as blackjack, craps, roulette, poker, pai gow or the like. Moreover, a player may also interact with the present invention so that the player has the capability for responding to sponsor or advertiser presented questionnaires, as well as for purchasing or viewing sponsor goods and/or services. Thus, the present invention provides an information exchange service within a gaming context for enticing players to view and/or interact with sponsor presentations such as interactive advertisements.

It is also an aspect of the present invention that each player or user is presented with advertisements for products and/or services, wherein it is believed the player will be receptive to the advertisement. That is, the present invention selectively presents advertisements to each player, according to stored characteristics and preferences of the player that the present invention has determined from, for example, player supplied personal information, player responses to questions, and/or analysis of player interactions such as player requests for additional information related an advertisement. Thus, such a selective presentation of advertisements allows a sponsor or advertiser to provide information related to relatively extensive or expensive promotionals (e.g., demonstrations, samples, discounts, trial subscriptions, prizes, bonuses) to players most likely to subsequently purchase the advertised product or service. Consequently, such selectivity can greatly increase the cost effectiveness of advertising, wherein the term, advertising (or advertising presentation), as used herein is understood to include not only product or service presentations that are merely informational, but also more interactive advertising presentations such as promotionals wherein discounts, free samples or a trial usage may be offered.

Moreover, it is an aspect of the present invention that each player may interact with and play a game at a time and pace (i.e., tempo) substantially of the player's choosing. In particular, the player is not bound by a required order or sequence of play involving other players, even though the player may be in competition with other players. In fact, a player may cease play for an extended time while in the midst of a game and subsequently continue the game at the point where the player ceased to play. Thus, if the present invention is easily accessible, then players may interact with the present invention at their leisure.

Accordingly, in a related aspect of the present invention, it is intended that players (morelgenerally, users) are able to interact with the present invention remotely, as for example, via the Internet and/or an interactive cable television network. Thus, using an Internet embodiment as an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, a gaming web site may be provided wherein players may access the interactive gaming capabilities of the present invention and substantially simultaneously also be presented with sponsor or advertiser provided information related to goods and/or services of the sponsor or advertiser (those two terms being used substantially interchangeably to denote e.g., those who provide advertising to users and/or subsidize game playing, product promotionals or network access). Moreover, the sponsor provided information may include, for example, hypertext links (also denoted hyperlinks) that allow players to activate, for example, network transfers for obtaining additional information regarding a sponsor's goods and/or services regardless of the status of any game in which a player may be currently involved at the gaming web site.

It is a further aspect in one embodiment of the present invention that a player is able to commence play of a game at substantially any time the player accesses the present invention. That is, it is not necessary for any previous game being played by other players to be completed for the player to commence play. In other words, games provided by the present invention may be continuously and asynchronously commenced or entered by players.

It is a further aspect of the present invention to require each player to use a distinct identification provided when the player "registers" with the present invention before playing any games so that a network site for the invention may be able to identify each player. Accordingly, it is an aspect of the present invention during registration, that each player provides personal information about him/herself both for gaming identification and for use as selection criteria by sponsors or advertisers for presenting particular presentations. For example, in the case of an Internet embodiment of the present invention, such registering can be performed via the Internet prior to play of any games at a gaming/advertising web site. Thus, players may be required to provide the present invention with information about themselves such as name, address, E-mail address, age, sex, and/or other player characteristics deemed pertinent to one or more sponsors or advertisers. Accordingly, the present invention provides a sponsor or advertiser with the capability to target its presentations substantially only to players or users having selected characteristics as, for example, determined from player information provided when registering with a network site for the present invention.

It is a further aspect of the present invention to have players compete against one another for prizes in one or more gaming tournaments. Using the Internet embodiment of the present invention as illustrative, a gaming/advertising web site for the present invention may partition the population of players into competitive groups wherein each group includes the players for a distinct tournament. Moreover, the present invention may determine a competitive group according to criteria such as: (a) the game(s) to be played in the tournament; (b) a skill level for the players (e.g., as determined by play in a previous tournament(s)); (c) particular player characteristics such as age, area of residence, home ownership, etc.; (d) particular player lifestyle traits such as traits exhibited by exercise enthusiasts or cruise ship enthusiasts; and (e) particular player preferences such as preferences related to jewelry, personal care products or particular sports.

It is a further aspect of the present invention to allow players to play games offered by the present invention without incurring financial risk or charges beyond those that are typical for the network being used in accessing the present invention.

It is a particular aspect of the present invention to provide blackjack and other casino-style games such as craps, roulette, poker, pai gow, or variations thereof, wherein such games may be played by a plurality of players continuously and asynchronously, and wherein each game is likely to be unique from all other games being played concurrently. Furthermore, in a related aspect of the present invention, such games may be automated so as to not require a manual dealer. Also, the present invention may be played, in one embodiment, in a gaming establishment (e.g., casino) using low cost gaming stations at which players may play such games entirely electronically. Alternatively, in another embodiment, the present invention may be used to play such casino style games as blackjack on the Internet. In this later embodiment, a blackjack game controller for the present invention communicates with blackjack players at Internet client nodes via a web site from which the blackjack game controller is accessed. Thus, blackjack players may play blackjack in the privacy of their own homes and at their leisure since the present invention does not require that a particular tempo of a blackjack game be maintained.

Additionally, the present invention utilizes novel varieties in such games, as blackjack, that make the games more enjoyable for users. For example, using variations of blackjack as illustrative, in one novel embodiment wherein the dealer functions are automated by a dealer module, this module can play blackjack with a plurality of players concurrently such that each player appears to be playing exclusively with the dealer module (e.g., "head-to-head"). Moreover, in one blackjack embodiment, each blackjack game is played asynchronously from other concurrent blackjack games with the dealer module. Furthermore, the dealer module may play a different dealer card hand with each player. In particular, the initial one (or two) cards (or card representations) dealt to the dealer for each game are unlikely to be the same for any two blackjack games being played with the dealer module; i.e., the probability of any two concurrently played blackjack games being identical is substantially equal to chance. Accordingly, this variation is particularly worthwhile when players are playing remotely through a network such as the Internet. Alternatively, in a different blackjack variation, the dealer module and each player concurrently playing blackjack with the dealer module may be provided with cards (or card representations) from the beginning of an identical sequence of card representations. Thus, each concurrently playing player receives an identical initial card hand and the dealer is also dealt an identical initial card hand. Subsequently, the card hands within each concurrent game will vary only if players request further cards differently. Accordingly, this variation of blackjack is particularly useful in tournament blackjack played within the confines of a casino, wherein the play of each player in the tournament is synchronized to start and stop within a predetermined interval. Note that this variation of blackjack is enjoyed by tournament players in that the tournament players may consider it a better or fairer way for demonstrating blackjack playing skill.

Other features and benefits of the present invention will become apparent from the detailed description with the accompanying figures contained hereinafter.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. **1** is a block diagram of an embodiment of the present invention wherein this embodiment may be used within a blackjack gaming establishment such as a casino;

FIG. **2** provides a representation of the gaming stations **18** of FIG. **1** wherein these gaming stations are used in gaming establishments for playing blackjack;

FIG. **3** is a block diagram of an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein the present invention is used to play blackjack on the Internet;

FIGS. **4A**–**4E** represent a flowchart for the processing performed by the blackjack game controller **14** when processing blackjack requests from players in either of the embodiments of FIG. **1** or FIG. **3**;

FIG. **5** provides a simple example of the operation of the present invention for playing a novel variation of blackjack wherein four blackjack games are shown being played asynchronously with the blackjack game controller;

FIGS. **6**A and **6**B are a block diagram of an Internet embodiment of the present invention;

FIG. **7** is a diagram illustrating how a user navigates through web pages of the World Wide Web for accessing the game/advertisement web site **308** (FIG. **6**) functionality; and

FIGS. **8**A and **8**B are an alternative embodiment of the game/advertisement web site **308**. In particular, FIGS. **8**A and **8**B is a block diagram of an alternative embodiment of the present invention wherein an advertisement sending daemon (i.e., TCP/IP daemon ad sender on the host computer **308**) and an advertisement receiving daemon **806** (on the client end user machine **318**) communicate for periodically displaying advertisements and other announcements to a user on the end user machine **318**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

In FIG. **1**, a block diagram is presented of a first embodiment of an electronic system **10** for the present invention for playing blackjack, wherein data flows are represented by solid arrows and control flows are represented by dashed arrows. In particular, the embodiment of FIG. **1** presents an architecture for the present invention for use on, for example, a local network within a casino, wherein low cost gaming stations may be utilized. Accordingly, the blackjack gaming system **10** includes a blackjack game controller **14** electronically connected to one or more potentially remote gaming stations **18** so that for each gaming station a player may play blackjack. In the blackjack gaming system **10**, the blackjack game controller **14** functions substantially as a dealer would in a manually operated blackjack game and each gaming station **18** provides a blackjack player with an electronic representation of a blackjack game wherein it may appear that the player (i.e., user) at the gaming station **18** is the only player playing against the dealer (i.e., "head-to-head" against the blackjack game controller **14**). Accordingly, each gaming station **18**, as will be discussed with reference to FIG. **2** below, includes a display for displaying both the dealer's cards and the player's cards. Each gaming station **18** also includes player interaction capabilities for requesting additional cards, activating various blackjack player options at appropriate times, and potentially increasing various wagers at predetermined phases of a blackjack game. Further note that each gaming station **18**, when in operation, may request a security code be provided by a player for identifying himself/herself or, alternatively, the gaming station may request the player to insert an electronic card (not shown) into the gaming station **18** so that information electronically encoded upon the card is read at the gaming station and transferred to the blackjack controller **14**.

Referring now to the internal structure of the blackjack game controller **14**, a gaming station interface **22** is provided for interfacing with each of the gaming stations **18**. In particular, the gaming station interface **22** buffers data signals between the other components included within the blackjack game controller **14** and the gaming stations **18**. For example, the gaming station interface **22** may have speed matching buffers in order to adjust for differences in speed between the blackjack game controller **14** and the gaming stations **18**. A blackjack driver **26** exchanges data with the gaming station interface **22**. The blackjack driver **26** substantially coordinates the operation of the blackjack game controller **14**. In particular, the following capabilities are substantially provided by the blackjack driver **26**:

(1.1) identifies each player requesting to play blackjack at one of the gaming stations **18**;

(1.2) creates internal data structures for communication with other modules of the blackjack game controller **14** regarding each blackjack game being played; in particular, blackjack gaming data objects or records are (re)instantiated with each player request, such data objects providing sufficient information for the blackjack game controller **14** to properly respond to each received player request;

(1.3) determines the output of the blackjack game controller **14** to each of the active gaming stations **18**;

(1.4) distributes blackjack gaming data between other modules of the blackjack game controller **14**; and

(1.5) provides card representations to gaming stations **18**.

In performing the above tasks, the blackjack driver **26** communicates with a blackjack player registration and playing status database **28**. The database system **28** maintains in persistent storage information regarding each blackjack player. In particular, the database system **28** maintains:

(2.1) information identifying each player; e.g., a unique player identification code;

(2.2) information regarding, for example, each blackjack player's financial status; in particular, a credit limit and a current amount of funds (either to be paid or received from the player);

(2.3) for each person registered to play blackjack, information regarding the status or context of any game the player is presently playing; that is, sufficient information is stored so that the blackjack game controller **14** can retrieve this information and continue a blackjack game in response to receiving a player's request;

(2.4) for each person registered to play blackjack, information regarding any blackjack tournament that the player is playing; in particular, since such a tournament typically requires a tournament player to complete a specified number of blackjack games in a predetermined amount of time and/or to complete a specified number of blackjack games out of a total number of blackjack games, the following types of information maybe stored: (a) information relating to the number of blackjack games completed by the player; (b) information related to the time and/or the number of games remaining in the tournament; and (c) information related to the amount of funds or points in the player's account for the tournament.

The blackjack driver **26** communicates with a wager accounting module **30** wherein the wager accounting module provides the following capabilities:

(3.1) determines various wagering limit parameters for the next one or more blackjack games to be played (e.g., the wagering limit per game and the total wagering limit per player); and

(3.2) performs wagering accounting for each player's wins and losses.

Thus, the wager accounting module **30** is instrumental in initializing a new blackjack game in that this module receives and maintains financial information related to each currently active player at a gaming station **18**. Thus, the wager accounting module **30** has a communication data channel with the blackjack player registration and playing status database **28** so that the wager accounting module **30** may retrieve information for determining whether the player has, for example, sufficient financial resources to cover potential wagering losses. Of course, to provide waging evaluation information to other controller **14** modules, the wager accounting module **30** receives identifying information from each such module requesting an evaluation.

The blackjack driver **26** also communicates with a blackjack player evaluator **34**. The blackjack player evaluator **34** receives, from each player (via instantiations of blackjack gaming data objects from the blackjack driver **26**), all blackjack player requests except the data from each player indicating an amount to be wagered. Thus, the blackjack player evaluator **34**:

(4.1) determines each player's options during blackjack games; and

(4.2) responds to player requests for hits or to, for example, split pairs.

Thus, the blackjack player evaluator **34** enforces the gaming establishment rules related to player options during a blackjack game. Note, however, that in responding to certain player requests, the blackjack player evaluator **34** communicates with the wager accounting module **30** to confirm that a proper wager accompanies the requested option and that the wager is acceptable to the wager accounting module **30**.

The blackjack player evaluator **34** is supplied with data corresponding to blackjack card representations from a card generator module **38**. The card generator module **38** generates, for example, an ordered collection or sequence of substantially random card representations and each such card representation is provided to the blackjack player evaluator **34**, wherein the blackjack player evaluator responds to each player's valid hit request by outputting the most recent card representation received from the card generator module **38**. That is, each player at a gaming station **18** receives a card representation according to when the player's request is received by the blackjack player evaluator **34**.

Further, note that the card generator module **38** also supplies the same card representations as supplied to the blackjack player evaluator **34** to a house blackjack playing module **42**, wherein this latter module plays the dealer's hand in each blackjack game. Thus, the house blackjack playing module **42** enforces the blackjack gaming rules on behalf of the gaming establishment. In particular, this module determines when and how insurance bets can be made related to the dealer's cards. Note, as with the blackjack player evaluator **34**, the house blackjack playing module **42** outputs, when required to provide the dealer's hand with another card representation at a gaming station **18**, the most recent card representation received from the card generator module **38**. Further note that the house blackjack playing module **42** provides control information to the blackjack driver **26**, particularly regarding activation of the blackjack insurance option. This information, in turn, is conveyed to the blackjack player evaluator **34** so that this latter evaluator may activate the insurance option for each player at an active gaming station **18**.

A blackjack hand evaluator **46** is also in communication with the blackjack driver **26**. The blackjack hand evaluator **46** evaluates each player's hand(s) in comparison to the dealer's blackjack hand for determining the win/loss/tie for each player's hand. Thus, the dealer's hand and the one or more hands played by each player at a gaming station **18** is supplied to the blackjack hand evaluator **46**. Subsequently, this evaluator outputs win/loss/tie results to the gaming stations **18** via the blackjack driver **26** and the gaming station interface **22**. Further, the blackjack hand evaluator **46** also outputs win/loss/tie results along with the identity of the player playing each hand to the, wager accounting module **30** so that wager credits and debits for each player's account may be updated according to the last or most recent blackjack game results.

In FIG. **2**, an embodiment of a gaming station **18** is illustrated. The gaming station **18** includes a player input area **204** wherein a player may press touch-sensitive portions of a thin film laminated with blackjack player operations and requests. Immediately above the player input area is a player output display area **208** for displaying blackjack gaming information related to the player. Optionally, each gaming station **18** may include a player identification card reader **216** so that a blackjack player may identify him/herself at a gaming station **18** by swiping a magnetic identification portion of a player identification card (not shown) through the card slot **220** thereby allowing the card reader **216** to transmit the player's encoded identification upon his/her card to the blackjack game controller **14**. However, it should be noted that other configurations of the gaming station **18** are also contemplated by the present invention. In particular, gaming station **18** may not have a card reader **216**. Instead, a blackjack player may be required to register either manually or automatically at a site remote from the gaming station **18**, or, alternatively personal identification numbers may be provided to players for identifying themselves via the player input area **204** wherein, for example, a numeric digit provided in the lower bottom portion of some of the touch-sensitive areas may be used by the player to input a personal identification number. Further, the arrangement of the touch-sensitive portions of the player input area **204** and the format of the display area **208** (both being discussed in detail below) may have other arrangements and still be within the scope of the present invention.

Describing in detail now the touch-sensitive portions of the player input area **204**, an activate/enter next game button **220** is provided. This button is used to initially activate the gaming station **18** so that a "request to play" signal is transmitted to the blackjack driver **26**. That is, assuming a player activates this button at a gaming station **18**, the blackjack driver **26** responds by requesting that the player input his/her identification via, for example, placing an identification card in the card reader **216** and/or a personal identification number via the player input area **204**. Additionally, note that the button **220** may be pressed at the end of a blackjack game for indicating that the player wishes to play another blackjack game. Note that in one embodiment of the present invention when consecutive games are played by a player, the player need only press the button **220** to commence a new game. That is, the player's identification need not be entered for each consecutive game played (assuming the button **220** is activated within a predetermined time after the last game has terminated).

The player input area **204** also includes a quit button **224** that a player may press to explicitly indicate the player's desire to terminate any further gaming at the gaming station **18**.

Additionally, buttons **228** through **248** provide the player with the capabilities to request the following blackjack gaming requests:

(5.1) The "HIT" button **228** allows the player to request another card to be dealt to him/her.

(5.2) The "STND" button **232** allows the player to stand on a current blackjack hand.

(5.3) The "DBL" button **236** allows the player to double down under appropriate circumstances as determined by the blackjack player evaluator **34**.

(5.4) The "SPLIT" button **240** allows the player to split the player's first two cards into two separate blackjack hands when these first two cards are identical.

(5.5) The "INS" button **244** allows the player to request insurance under the circumstances where the dealer's single face-up card is an ace.

(5.6) The "BET" button **248** allows the player to request that a bet or wager be entered during a blackjack game.

Note that subsequent to requesting a bet via the "BET" button **248**, the buttons **252** through **264** areactivated so that the player may input various betting amounts. In particular, buttons **252** through **264** provide the player with the option to bet $5.00 (button **252**), $25.00 (button **256**), $100.00 (button **260**) and $500.00 (button **264**). Moreover, a sequence of the buttons **252** through **264** may be pressed for obtaining a bet not provided by a single button. For example, to bet $130.00, the player presses consecutively each of the buttons **252**, **256** and **260** (in any order) exactly once.

The player input area **204** also includes various confirm and cancel buttons **268** through **276**. The accept button **268** allows the user to accept a last input. For example, it is an aspect in the present embodiment of the invention that after each user input, the input is accepted either by the player explicitly pressing the accept button **268** or by allowing a predetermined amount of time to expire after the last player input. The "CANCEL BET" button **272** allows the user to cancel an immediately preceding bet that was input. However, note that if a time limit is exceeded for placing a bet due to, for example, the player pressing the "CANCEL" button **272**, then any minimum bet required will be automatically wagered on the player's behalf by the wager accounting module **30**. Further, the "CANCEL LAST" button **276** may be used by the player to cancel the immediately preceding wager of one of the dollar amount buttons **252** through **264**. Thus, if a player intended to bet $125.00 by pressing first the button **260** followed by the button **256** but instead pressed the button sequence **260** and **264**, then the player may press the button **276** for canceling the $500.00 bet associated with button **264** and subsequently the player presses the button **256** to obtain the desired bet of $125.00. Note further that pressing the "CANCEL LAST" button twice in succession also cancels the entire bet.

A "SPEED OF PLAY" button **280** may be optionally provided on the player input area **204**. This button allows the player to specify to the blackjack driver **26**, for example, the predetermined amount of time after a player input to wait before each subsequent input is automatically accepted. In one embodiment of the present invention, the "SPEED OF PLAY" button **280** includes active areas at each end of the button, wherein if the user presses the "slower" end of the button **280**, then the predetermined time(s) for automatically accepting a player input is lengthened. Alternatively, if the player presses the "faster" end of the button **280**, then the predetermined default acceptance time(s) becomes shorter. However, it is important to note that the tempo of the blackjack game is, using the present invention, no longer as important as in typical blackjack gaming situations. That is, since each blackjack player using the present invention is not playing in sequence with other players, there is less concern about speedily playing so as not to delay other players.

Lastly, the player input area **204** includes a "HELP" button **284** for allowing the player to request assistance from, for example, the personnel of the gaming establishment providing the gaming station **18**.

Referring now to display area **208**, the screen display provided here is but one of a number of contemplated screen layouts for the present invention. In particular, the screen layout illustrated in display area **208** is a representative layout for use in playing tournament blackjack. Thus, when other modes of blackjack are played other than tournament blackjack, then it is within the scope of the present invention to modify the fields represented in the display area **208** according to the player needs for the type of blackjack being played. Further, it is important to note that in one embodiment, the display **208** is in color so that, for example, diamonds and hearts are in red and spades and clubs are in black, and various fields of the display area **208** may be highlighted for focusing a player's attention on the portion of the display providing information most relevant to the player's currently permissible options.

Describing now the fields currently presented in display **208**, at the top of the display is the house hand area **288**: (a) for providing a representation of the cards that have been dealt to the house; (b) for providing a status of the house hand (i.e. one of: "STND" for standing, "BUSTED", when the value of the house hand exceeds **21**, and "CONTINUING" when the house may take additional hits. That is, this field provides an annotation "house hand:" followed by a representation for at least one card that has been dealt to the house; i.e., an ace of hearts. In the player's hand area **292** of the display area **208**, there are five columns providing information related to each blackjack hand the player is currently playing in the blackjack game. The columns provide the following information:

(6.1) The "PLAYER HAND(S)" column provides, in each row of this column, a different blackjack hand that is being played simultaneously by the player in the current blackjack game. Thus, two blackjack hands are presently represented as being played simultaneously by the player on the display area **208**. That is, an upper or first hand having a three of spades, king of hearts, and a five of spades, and, a lower or second blackjack hand having a three of clubs and an eight of diamonds. (Note, when a player chooses to double down, card representations in common between two blackjack hands may be displayed in a row between the remaining card representations for both hands. Alternatively, card representations in common between blackjack hands may be duplicated in the blackjack hands to which the common cards representations apply.)

(6.2) A "STATUS" column for indicating the current status of each blackjack hand the player is playing. That is, for the first or upper hand that the player currently is playing the status is "STND" thereby indicating that the player has elected to stand on this hand. Alternatively, for the second or lower hand a status of "PICK OPTION" is provided thereby indicating that it is the player's turn to pick a blackjack playing option for this hand. Note that there are at least three possible values for the status field of each blackjack hand being played. That is, in addition to the two represented in FIG. **2**, a "BUSTED" status value is output for indicating that the value of the related blackjack hand has exceeded **21**.

(6.3) The "OPTIONS" column provides, for each blackjack hand being played, an indication of the permissible blackjack plays that the player currently may select from for the related blackjack hand in the same row. Thus, for the first hand illustrated in area **292**, there are no options remaining for the player to play related to this hand. However, on the second hand, four permissible player inputs are displayed as options to the player. That is, the player may stand on the related hand

(STND) by pressing button **232**, the player may request a hit (HIT) by pressing button **228**, the player may double down (DBL) by pressing button **236** and the player may bet an additional wager by pressing button **248** and subsequently putting a bet amount using buttons **252** through **264**.

(6.4) The "LAST BET" column displays to the player his/her last bet for each blackjack hand the player is currently playing. In particular, for both the upper and lower hands shown in area **292**, the player's last bet was $50.00.

(6.5) The "TOTAL BET" column displays to the player the total bet the player has wagered on the blackjack hand to which it relates. For example, in FIG. **2**, in both the upper and lower player's blackjack hands displayed, the player has bet a total of $200.00.

Below the player hand area **292** is the player information area **296** wherein additional blackjack gaming information relating to the player is displayed. In particular, labeled line **300** displays the most recent bet amount that the player has requested along with a tag indicating the status (e.g., "ACCEPT/CANCEL") of the most recent bet. Note that the status may be: (a) "ACCEPTED" for explicitly or implicitly indicating the acceptance of a displayed wager (via the player pressing the accept button **268** or by default due to a time limit expiring); (b) "CANCELLED" for explicitly indicating the cancellation of the last entered wager (via the player pressing either of the cancel buttons **272** or **276**); (c) "REJECTED", this status being displayed due to the wager accounting module **30** rejecting the player's most recent bet; and (d) "ACCEPT/CANCEL" for indicating that the present invention is waiting a predetermined amount of time for the player to explicitly accept or cancel the most recent bet. Thus, in the example of line **300** in FIG. **2**., the player has indicated a most recent bet of $30.00 and the blackjack driver **26** has output a status of "ACCEPT/CANCEL" as in (d) above. Further note that the blackjack hand(s) to which this most recent bet applies may be designated in any of a number of ways such as, for example, highlighting the row(s) in the player hand area **292** of the blackjack hand(s) to which the most recent bet of line **300** applies. Alternately, an indicator such as arrows **302** may be used as in FIG. **2** to indicate to the player that the most recent bet is to be applied to both the upper and lower blackjack hand(s).

Additionally, note that line **304** displays the annotation "INSURANCE BET:" together with any insurance amount that has been bet by the player. Accordingly, the dollar amount on line **304** and the notation at the right end of the line pertain, respectively, to the amount that has been bet as insurance, and the status of this bet (i.e., one of "ACCEPTED", "CANCELLED", "REJECTED" or "ACCEPT/CANCEL" as in line **300**).

In line **312** of the player information area **296**, the total amount of funds available by the player for betting is displayed. For example, line **312** of FIG. **2** indicates that the player has a total amount for betting of $1,000.00. Note that the wager accounting module **30** maintains this total amount available for betting and updates it after each blackjack game.

The lower three lines **320**, **324** and **328** of the player information area **296** provide blackjack player information that is particularly useful when playing in a blackjack tournament. Thus, the information in these three lines may not be displayed when the present invention is used by players not in a tournament. In line **320**, two fields are provided for displaying playing time information. The left-most field, annotated by the label "ELAPSED PLAYING TIME:", displays the total amount of time the player has played blackjack (which in this case is 45 minutes). Alternatively, the rightmost field, annotated by the label "REMAINING PLAYING TIME:", displays the time remaining in the tournament.

In line **324** an identifier for any tournament associated with the present blackjack game is displayed.

In line **328**, up to two additional fields are provided that are useful in tournament blackjack. The leftmost field having an annotation of "GAMES PLAYED:" displays to the player the number of blackjack games he/she has completed within a tournament. Note that in some blackjack tournaments each player is required to complete a certain predetermined number of games within a predetermined allotted time period. For example, a blackjack tournament may require each player to play 50 games within a predetermined interval (such as four days). Relatedly, but optionally, in blackjack gaming contexts where the total number of blackjack games in the tournament is meaningful, the rightmost field of line **328**, having the annotation "GAME NUMBER:", displays to the player the total number of tournament games that have been completed thus far in the tournament. Accordingly, using at least the leftmost annotated field in line **328** and "REMAINING PLAYING TIME:" annotated field of line **320**, the player is able to determine the number of remaining games in the tournament that he/she must play.

Further note that other blackjack game values are contemplated by the present invention. For example, a field providing the number of games remaining that a player must play in the tournament may be added (or substituted for) in addition to the current values in the player information area **296**.

In a next display **208** lower area, denoted the rules area **336**, blackjack house rules are displayed. In particular, the house rules displayed in area **336** allow variations upon the typical blackjack rules that a player is likely to assume if not presented with information to the contrary. Note that by providing these additional rules on the display of gaming stations **18**, successive blackjack games may be provided with different house blackjack rules thereby creating an increased interest in each game by the players and requiring additional blackjack playing skills from the players. Note that three house rules are provided in the present display area **336**. That is, (a) insurance for the present blackjack game pays 3 to 1 odds (instead of the typical 2 to 1 odds); (b) the player may double down after splitting only once; and (c) the minimum bet is $25.00 for the current game.

Lastly, the display **208** includes a player identification area **342** for identifying the player currently playing blackjack at the gaming station **18**. The present player area **342**, includes a field having the current player's name (e.g., I. B. SMITH). However, other fields identifying the player are also contemplated by the present invention including, for example, a player identification number such as the number that may be encoded upon a player identification card used in conjunction with the card reader **216** for identifying the player.

FIG. **3** presents a second embodiment of the blackjack gaming system of the present invention. In this embodiment, the blackjack game controller **14** is substantially the same as described hereinabove. However, this controller **14** is now accessible through an Internet web site **308** so that blackjack players at Internet client nodes **318** can play blackjack on the blackjack game controller **14** via the Internet **324** (or more particularly, via the World Wide Web).

Accordingly, describing the web site **308** in more detail, it includes an Internet interface **332** for receiving and supplying communications between the Internet **324** and the remainder of the web site **308**. The Internet interface **332**, in turn, communicates with World Wide Web server **340**: (a) for validating and/or initiating registration of web site users (e.g., blackjack players) at web site **308**; and (b) for interpreting Internet requests for routing and/or activating web site **308** modules that can fulfill such requests. Thus, the World Wide Web server **340** may access the database system **28** for determining the registration identity of, for example, a blackjack player. Additionally, upon receiving user registration confirmation regarding an Internet (e.g., World Wide Web) request, the World Wide Web server **340** activates instantiations of modules known as common gateway interface (CGI) scripts, each CGI script **348** instantiation (or, for simplicity, each such instantiation also being referred to as a CGI script **348**) being: (a) for interpreting and processing Internet requests according to the semantics of a web site **308** application associated with the CGI script; and (b) for constructing Internet responses from output from the associated application. Thus, there are one or more common gateway interface modules provided wherein each CGI script **348** (instantiation) invokes the blackjack game controller **14** to process a single Internet blackjack request from an Internet client node **318** where a player is playing blackjack, and subsequently the CGI script **348** constructs an appropriate Internet response from the output received from the blackjack game controller **14**.

Since the embodiment of the blackjack game controller **14** of FIG. **3** is substantially identical to that of FIG. **1**, a description of its internal structure is not repeated here. However, it is worthwhile to note that the embodiment of FIG. **3** is particularly appropriate when the blackjack game controller **14** executes on a different or remote processor from that of, for instance, the processor performing the CGI script(s) **348**. Further, note that if the blackjack game controller **14** executes on the same processor as the other web site **308** modules of FIG. **3**, then the communication interface **22** may be unnecessary, and additionally, much of the functionality of the other components of the blackjack game controller **14** may be incorporated into one or more CGI scripts **348**. Thus, for example, the blackjack player evaluator **34** functionality may be incorporated into one CGI script **348** while house blackjack playing module **42** functionality may be incorporated into another CGI script.

There are also noteworthy distinctions between the gaming stations **18** of FIGS. **1** and **2** and the Internet client nodes **318** of FIG. **3** as well as distinctions in blackjack play interactions. For example, the following distinctions may be provided:

(7.1) Due to the potentially lengthy delays that occur on the Internet, the embodiment of FIG. **3** does not provide for automatic acceptance of a blackjack play (e.g., acceptance of an input bet or a default to a minimum ante) due to a time period expiring. Thus, the speed of play is determined by the responsiveness of each player and the responsiveness of the Internet.

(7.2) Players may play blackjack in tournaments against one another on the Internet wherein, for each tournament entered by a player, he/she receives, without cost, a predetermined number of points to use for playing in the tournament. Note that prizes may be awarded to tournament winners as incentive to play in such blackjack tournaments. Further note that the time period to complete a tournament may be substantially more lengthy than the time periods for typical blackjack tournament play. For example, a tournament may extend for 90 days since players can play at their leisure.

(7.3) The input keys of gaming station **18** of FIG. **1** may be also presented on the display screens of Internet client nodes **318** wherein the input buttons of gaming station **18** now become active buttons on a blackjack web page generated by the web site **308** and presented to a player at an Internet client node **318**. However, note that at least the speed of play key **280** is not necessary, as mentioned in reference to the embodiment of FIGS. **1** and **2** since the speed of play is of diminished importance.

(7.4) There may be other types of information output to an Internet client node **318** in addition to the information displayed in FIG. **3**. In particular, advertising information may be provided with each web site **308** response to a player regarding, for example, blackjack tournament sponsors and prizes.

In FIGS. **4A**–**4E**, a flowchart is presented of the high level steps performed by the blackjack game controller **14** when processing player requests in either of the embodiments of FIGS. **1** or **3** for playing a novel blackjack variation wherein new eligible card representations are generated periodically regardless of whether they are dealt in a blackjack game or not and wherein the blackjack players may play the game asynchronously from one another. In step **408**, the blackjack game controller **14** is initialized so that it may process blackjack player requests and output appropriate responses to each player's request. Subsequently, in step **416**, the card generator module **38** commences to output at regular intervals (e.g., less than two seconds such as every 0.5 seconds) random card representations to both the blackjack player evaluator **34** and the house blackjack playing module **42**. Thus, for as long as the blackjack game controller **14** is properly responding to blackjack player requests, the card generator module **38** continuously and regularly outputs card representations. Concomitantly with the actions in step **416**, the remaining steps of FIGS. **4A**–**4E** are performed. Thus, in step **424**, the controller **14** waits for a (next) blackjack player input, such inputs being, for example, requests to enter a new blackjack tournament, requests to commence a new blackjack game within a tournament, requests to process a blackjack game play request, a request for information regarding the players account, and a request for help information (such as how to play blackjack).

Upon receiving a blackjack player request, in step **430** the communication interface **22** queues the request and subsequently transmits the request to the blackjack driver **26**. In step **436**, a determination is made as to whether the player's request is related to a current blackjack game and/or Current blackjack tournament. If not, then step **448** is encountered wherein an additional determination is made as to whether the player's request is to enter a new blackjack tournament. If so, then in step **454** the blackjack driver **26** determines a blackjack tournament and enters the player into the tournament. Note that in providing this function, the blackjack player **26** communicates with the wager accounting module **30** to confirm that the player is eligible to enter a new tournament. Thus, the blackjack driver **26** supplies the wager accounting module **30** with at least the player's identification and a specification of the tournament in which the player may be entered. Note that the tournament selection may be provided by the player in some embodiments of the present invention. Alternatively, the blackjack driver **26** may select a tournament for the player using tournament information stored in the database system **28**. Assuming that the wager accounting module **30** responds with a confirmation that the player may be entered into the selected tournament, in step **458**, the blackjack driver **26** creates a confirmation record identifying the blackjack tournament in which the player is entered. Subsequently, in step **462** the blackjack driver **26** outputs information in the confirmation record to the player at his/her Internet client node **318** (gaming station **18**). Thus, in the embodiment of FIG. **3** of the present invention, the output of step **462** (and all subsequent such outputs to a blackjack player) are output from the blackjack driver **26** to the communication interface **22** for queuing until the output can be transmitted to the CGI script **348** that initiated the player request to which this output is a response. Subsequently, the output is transmitted to the World Wide Web server **340** and to the Internet interface **332** for transmitting on the Internet **324** and thereby being routed to the Internet client node **318** where the player is playing blackjack.

Following step **462**, in step **466**, the blackjack driver **26** enters, into the database system **28**, information indicating the blackjack tournament in which the player has been entered. Note that the information entered here into the database system **28** is subsequently accessible both by the blackjack driver **26** and the wager accounting module **30** for determining the tournament(s) in which the player has been entered. Following this step, since the player's request has been processed, the flow of control loops back to step **424** to wait for the next player input from a player at an Internet client node **318** or alternatively a gaming station **18**.

Returning now to step **448**, if the player has not requested to enter a blackjack tournament then step **470** is encountered to process any miscellaneous blackjack player requests not related to a current blackjack game and/or blackjack tournament. For example, a player may request accounting information related to his/her blackjack gaming account. Assuming such requests are processed and responded to in this step, the flow of control again returns to step **424** to wait for a next player input.

Returning now to step **436**, if the player request is related to a current blackjack and/or blackjack tournament, then step **476** is encountered wherein the blackjack driver **426** uses the player's identification (ID) provided with the request for retrieving any status information from the database system **28** regarding any current blackjack game and/or blackjack tournament in which the player may be currently involved. Subsequently, in step **480**, a determination is made as to whether the player request is to commence a new blackjack game in a current tournament. If so, then in step **484** the blackjack driver **26** requests confirmation from the wager accounting module **30** that the player can commence with a new blackjack game in the current tournament. That is, the wager accounting module **30** determines whether the player has sufficient tournament credits to continue in the tournament. Following this, in step **488**, the blackjack driver **26** determines whether a confirmation has been received from the wager accounting module **30**. If no such confirmation is provided, then in step **492**, the blackjack driver **26** outputs a message to the player at his/her Internet client node **318** (gaming station **18**) indicating that no further blackjack games in the current tournament may be played by the player.

Alternatively, if in step **488** the blackjack driver **26** receives confirmation from the wager accounting module **30**, then in step **494** the blackjack driver **26** creates a blackjack game record for fulfilling the player's request. Note that in creating the new blackjack game data record, the blackjack driver **26** communicates with the wager accounting module **30** to both debit the playerts account for any initial ante corresponding to commencing the new blackjack game and also to output to the blackjack driver **26** data of this transaction for subsequently outputting to the player. Following this step, in step **496**, the blackjack driver **26** requests the blackjack player evaluator **34** to provide an initial blackjack game configuration for the new blackjack game. Subsequently, in step **500**, the blackjack player evaluator **34** responds with an initial blackjack game configuration, wherein this configuration includes the initial card representation for the player's hand (as shown, for example, in area **292** of FIG. **2**). Note that this initial card representation is the most recent card representation provided to the blackjack player evaluator **34** by the card generator module **38**. Thus, note that if two player requests to commence a new blackjack game were transmitted to the blackjack driver **26** in rapid succession, then step **500** may be performed for each of the requests before the dealer module **38** outputs a new random card representation to the blackjack player evaluator **34**. Consequently, in such a case both players will be presented with an identical initial card representation for the player's hand. Subsequently, in step **504**, the blackjack driver **26** stores information regarding the identity and initial configuration of the new blackjack game for the player in the database system **28**. In particular, a blackjack game identifier for the new game is stored and associated with the identity of the blackjack player and the tournament. to which the game is associated. Following step **500**, in step **504**, the blackjack driver **26** stores information regarding the new blackjack game for the player in the database system **28**. In particular, the following information is stored regarding the initial configuration of the new blackjack game: the player's identity, the identity of the tournament for which the new game corresponds, and identifier identifying the new game, and an initial configuration for the new blackjack game including card representations and any initial required bets. Further, note that throughout the course of each blackjack game played by a player, the blackjack driver **26** and the wager accounting module **30** update information in the database system **28** as the game configuration changes due to interactions between the player and the blackjack game controller **14**. Thus, for a blackjack game underway, each request from a player for continuing the game with a next play, need not provide the entire game configuration to the blackjack game controller **14**. Instead, only sufficient information is required in the request for the blackjack driver **26** and/or the wager accounting module **30** to retrieve information related to the blackjack game configuration corresponding to the player's request. Following step **504**, in step **508**, the blackjack driver **26** outputs an initial blackjack game configuration for the new game to the player at his/her Internet client node **318** (gaming station **18**). Subsequently, the flow of control once again returns to step **424** to await a next player input to the controller **14**.

Returning now to step **480**, if it is determined here that the player request is not to commence a new blackjack game in a current tournament, then step **520** is encountered wherein a determination is made as to whether the player request is related to a play in a currently active blackjack game. If not, then in step **524** the blackjack game controller **14** processes miscellaneous requests such as, for example, a request for special blackjack rules relating to a current game and/or tournament, the number of players remaining in the current tournament, the player's ranking in the current tournament, and the prizes for winners of the current tournament. Subsequently, assuming such miscellaneous requests are responded to, in step **524**, the flow of control for the present flowchart returns to **424** to await a next player input.

Alternatively, if in step **520** the player request is related to a play in a currently active blackjack game, then in step **528** a further determination is made as to whether the player request is for a new card representation. If so, then in step **532**, a determination is made as to whether the card request is for the house or for the player. If the card request is from the house, then in step **536** the blackjack driver **26** communicates with the house blackjack playing module **42** for obtaining a new blackjack game configuration for the current blackjack game, wherein the new game configuration includes the most recently output card representation from the card generator module **38** as the next card representation in the house hand for the blackjack game from which the current player's request came. Subsequently, in step **542** the house blackjack playing module **42** outputs blackjack game configuration information indicating the new house hand card representation and any player response(s) that the player may exercise in responding to the new blackjack game configuration.

Upon receiving the house blackjack playing module **42** output, in step **546**, the blackjack driver **26** determines whether there is a further player response in the present game by invoking one or both of the blackjack player evaluator **34** and the blackjack hand evaluator **46**. If there are additional possible player responses, then in step **550** the blackjack driver **26** outputs a blackjack game configuration to the player at his/her Internet client node **318** (gaming station **18**) so that the player may exercise one of his/her available game options. Subsequently, having processed the-player's request the flow of control again loops back to step **424** to await a next player input. Alternatively, if in step **546** the blackjack driver **26** determines that there are no further possible player responses, then the current blackjack game is complete and the blackjack driver **26** in step **556** activates the blackjack hand evaluator **46** for evaluating the blackjack game hands so that the blackjack hand evaluator can activate the wager accounting module **30** to update the player's account (according to the results of the blackjack game) in the database system **28**. Following this step, in step **560** the wager accounting module **30** outputs to the blackjack driver **26** updated accounting information to be provided to the player. In step **564**, the blackjack driver **26** outputs the results of the blackjack game and the players updated account information to the player. Also, note that the blackjack driver **26** updates the database system **28** regarding the completion of the present blackjack game as well as any further status information related to the player and the tournament to which the present blackjack game is associated. Subsequently, having processed the player's request, the flow of control again loops back to step **424** to await a next player input.

Alternatively, if in step **532** it is determined that the player's request is for a new card representation for the player, then in step **568** the blackjack driver **26** activates the blackjack player evaluator **34** for obtaining, a new blackjack game configuration for the current blackjack game, wherein the new game configuration includes the most recently output card representation from the card generator module **38** as the next card representation for the player's hand(s). Subsequently, in step **572** the blackjack player evaluator **34** determines the next blackjack play options the player may exercise for the present game and then outputs the new blackjack configuration with these options to the blackjack driver **26**. Following this, the steps **546** and subsequent steps are performed as described above.

Returning now to step **528**, if the player request is not for a new card representation then step **576** is encountered wherein the blackjack game controller **14** processes other blackjack player game requests such as requests for additional bets, cancellations of bets, a request to stand on a particular player hand, a request to split a pair of card representations, or a request for insurance. Assuming, that such requests as described above are processed, in step **580** the blackjack driver **26** subsequently outputs a new blackjack game configuration to the player according to the processing performed in step **576**. Also, note that the blackjack driver **26** updates the database system **28** with information relating to the new blackjack game configuration so that it may be retrieved upon a subsequent player request relating to the present game. Following this step, the flow of control for the present flowchart loops back to step **424** to again wait for another player input.

FIG. **5** presents a simple example of the operation of the present invention for playing blackjack wherein four blackjack games are shown being played asynchronously with the blackjack game controller **14**. To describe FIG. **5** in detail, note first that the row of numbers **604** across the top of the figure represents a sequence of values of successive card representations output by the card generator module **38**. That is, in a first time interval a card representation having a value of three is output, in a second time interval a card representation having a value of five is output, in a third time interval a card representation having a value of seven is output and so on across the row. Below row **604** are blackjack game rows **606**, wherein each blackjack game row **606** represents a series of events that occur in each blackjack game **610** through **626** over the course of time corresponding, to the series of card values **604**. In particular, the numerical entries within each blackjack game row **606** correspond to the values of the player and house card hands as additional cards are added to the player and house hands of each blackjack game. For example, referring to blackjack game row **610**, assuming this blackjack game commences with the player's hand obtaining the card representation for the leftmost card value of the sequence **604** (i.e. the value three), the player s hand has a corresponding value of three. Subsequently, if the house blackjack playing module **42** is activated for this game to output (i.e. deal) an initial card representation to the house during the second time interval (i.e. the card generator module **38** has output a card representation of five), then the house hand initially has a value of five. Subsequently, if in the third interval the player for blackjack game **610** provides a request for another card, then the card representation corresponding to the value of seven in sequence **604** is provided to the player and therefore the player's hand has a total value of ten. Following the incorporation of the seven into the player's hand, this blackjack game is delayed so that the next time interval corresponding to the value of two in sequence **604** is not dealt to either the player or the house in blackjack game **610**. Note that it is an important aspect of the present invention that card representations generated by the card generator module **38** are only incorporated into a particular blackjack game when a request for such a card representation is made during the time the card representation is the most recent output from the card,generator module **38**. Thus, one or more card representations output by the card generator module **38** during a blackjack game may not be used in the game. More precisely, it is typical (although not shown in the example of FIG. **5**) that substantially any length or subsequence of consecutive card representations output by the card generator module **38** may be ignored within a given blackjack game due to time delays occurring in the game. Thus, in some circumstances such delays could be as long as a number of days if the player, for example, did not request another hit during such a time interval.

Continuing now with the remaining plays of blackjack game **610**, note that in the fifth time interval the player requests a hit thereby obtaining a card representation having a value of nine and thus obtaining a player's hand value of nineteen. Subsequently, the house takes hits for the next two consecutive card representations having values eight and ten respectively. Thus, the house hand busted when the value of twenty-three was obtained for the house hand.

Blackjack game rows **606** for blackjack games **614** through **626** may be interpreted similarly to the description above for blackjack game **610**. Note however that each of these games commence at a different time interval in that each game commences with a different card representation taken as the first hit for the player's hand. That is, the first card representation dealt in each of the blackjack games **610** through **626** is different and further each of the card representations requested corresponding to values of the sequence **604** is different for each blackjack game. Therefore, substantially every blackjack game, even if played concurrently with other blackjack games, will have unique player hands and house hands. Thus, not only can a large number of asynchronous blackjack games be played simultaneously head-to-head with the house, but also there may be a greater degree of confidence by the blackjack players that the house is not manipulating card representations in that blackjack players may substantially determine the timing for substantially all hits in a blackjack game (for both the player hand and the house hand) and thereby reduce any suspicions that the card representations are being manipulated. Moreover, in one embodiment, the players may request the sequence of card representations that were generated during the course of a game.

Note that the present invention also may include other blackjack variations as well. In particular, referring to step **416** (FIG. **4**A) again, instead of generating card representations at regular intervals, this step may simply activate the card generator module **38** so that it generates a substantially random card representation on demand whenever a request for a new card representation is made (e.g., steps **536** and **568**).

Additionally, in another blackjack variation, particularly suited for tournament blackjack where each player can be monitored, the players play each play of a blackjack game synchronously as blackjack is typically played with a human dealer in casinos. However, in the present variation, each player is provided with the identical card representations for their initial cards. Subsequently, each player hand and the house (i.e., dealer) hand varies between players only when players play their blackjack hands differently. That is, for each synchronously played blackjack game among a plurality of players, the same sequence of card representations is available to each player and the house blackjack playing module **42** so that, for example, the dealt card representations in each game between one of the players and the house blackjack playing module are identical for players playing the same sequence of plays throughout the game. Accordingly, as one skilled in the art will appreciate, for each blackjack game, it may be necessary for the card generator module **38** to maintain a predetermined sequence (or ordered collection) of card representations throughout the game so that players playing differently may be dealt an appropriately sequenced card representation. Moreover, it may also be necessary for the house blackjack dealer playing module **42** to provide sufficient control information to the card generator module **38** so that the card generator module can respond with the appropriate card representation from the predetermined sequence.

Another embodiment of the present invention is presented in FIGS. **6**A and **6**B, wherein this embodiment is enhanced for presenting sponsor or advertiser product and/or service advertising to qualified players that adequately match a predetermined player profile such as a demographic profile of a particular group of players. Accordingly, in FIGS. **6**A and **6**B, there is a game/advertisement controller **604** for providing substantially the same functionality as the blackjack game controller **14** (FIG. **3**) except that games other than blackjack may also be played (such as poker, craps, pai gow and roulette). Additionally, the game/advertisement controller **604** also performs functions related to matching particular advertising with the users (i.e., players) playing the various games provided by the game/advertisement web site **308**, wherein each user communicates with the web site **308** on a corresponding Internet client node **318** (alternatively interactive cable television node). That is, the present FIGS. **6**A and **6**B present the high level modules for matching players having desired user characteristics (e.g., profiles) with advertising from sponsors or advertisers requesting players with such user characteristics. In particular, only the players with such desired profiles qualify for receiving a particular advertisement and/or promotional (i.e., advertising) from a particular sponsor or advertiser. Accordingly, it is an aspect of the present invention that various criteria may be used to make such a determination as to which players (or, more generally, users) receive which advertising. For example, one or more of the following attributes may be used in matching users with advertising presentations:

(8.1) age,

(8.2) sex,

(8.3) financial status,

(8.4) location or residence,

(8.5) education,

(8.6) marital status,

(8.7) amount of recreational time,

(8.8) personal tastes and/or habits (e.g., smoker/non-smoker, preferences for sports, movies, liquor, foods, clothes, vacations, cars, etc.),

(8.9) size of household,

(8.10) number of children, and

(8.11) categorizations of users according to network interactions such as the type of web sites accessed, the type of advertising for which the user seeks additional information, the risk tolerance in playing games such as blackjack.

To provide (or, match) particular users with particular advertising, data (or user information items) on each user is maintained in the form of a user profile in the user (player) database **28** which is an enhanced version of the blackjack player registration and playing status database **28** of FIG. **3**. The user profiles are populated with such user related information as in (8.1) through (8.11). This information is obtained when users register at the web site **308** when users respond to explicit questions subsequently asked of them, or by monitoring the network activities of users. Note that user profiles may vary in length, depending on the amount of information obtained on each user. Moreover, different types of information may be obtained for different types of users. For example, for users having assets of more than one million dollars, these users may be requested to enter their favorite vacation destination location since this may be important for certain advertisers. However, for users whose assets are less than forty thousand dollars, no such information may be obtained since the information would be likely irrelevant to any advertiser. Thus, in one embodiment of the user profiles, each user profile has a variable length section for storing user information items not uniform across all users. Moreover, in such an embodiment, each user information item stored in the variable length section may be considered as a pair, wherein the first component of each pair indicates or references a question, user attribute, or user classification to which the second component provides an answer or value related to the first component. Thus, for example, for a particular user, an information item may provide the pair: (4, "Madrid"), wherein "4" identifies the attribute: "favorite vacation destination location," and "Madrid" is the value for this attribute, as one skilled in the art will understand.

Alternatively, data related to the advertisers or sponsors may reside in a different database, the advertiser database **612**. Accordingly, this database stores demographic profiles which, in one embodiment, have a data structure substantially identical to the user profile data structure. Such demographic profiles may have a variable length section for specifying requested values for user information items that may be provided in (potentially only a relatively small, number of) user profiles. In some embodiments, a demographic profile includes a reference to the advertiser's or sponsor's identity, a reference to the advertising to be presented and a variable length section of demographic item pairs, wherein the first component of each pair has the same interpretation as the first component of a user information item pair and the second component of the pair specifies a desired value or range of values that the advertiser or sponsor prefers. Further, note that, in some embodiments, each demographic item pair may have additional information associated with it such as a perceived importance of the demographic item pair to the advertiser or sponsor. Thus, such additional information may be in the form of a normalized scalar value wherein a value of one indicates that the demographic item pair is of highest importance whereas a value of zero indicates that the demographic item is substantially irrelevant to the advertiser or sponsor. Accordingly, regardless of the particular embodiment of the demographic profiles, the users' demographic profiles are used to match (i.e., select) one or more corresponding advertising presentations with a particular target group of users that, presumably, are likely to purchase the product and/or service portrayed in such advertising presentations. Thus, since such advertising presentations may be provided to only users who are likely to be subsequent customers, advertisers and/or sponsors may provide to these users specifically targeted advertising having relatively expensive promotionals such as product or service discounts, free samples, or a trial usage.

Accordingly, to perform the selecting or matching of users with such demographic profiles, for each user, the user profiles stored in the user database **28** are compared with the demographic profiles by the advertising selection engine **618**. Note that there are numerous techniques for performing such a comparison for selecting a group of users. In particular, a precise match may be required between each demographic item pair and a corresponding user information item pair so that the second component of the user information item pair is (within) a desired range as specified in the corresponding demographic item pair. Alternatively, various weighting statistical techniques may be used for determining a "similarity" measurement when not all demographic pairs are required to precisely match a demographic profile. In one embodiment, the similarity measurement may

be provided by a statistical analysis module that determines the users that most closely match the corresponding demographic profile for an advertising presentation. Thus, in order for a user to be selected, the similarity measurement between the user's profile and a corresponding demographic profile may be required to be above a predetermined threshold. Additionally, note that the advertising selection engine **618** may perform the matching of users with advertising presentations as a background or non-real time process so that, for example, for each user profile in the user database **28**, there is a related table identifying the advertising presentations that are candidates for presentation to the corresponding user when, for instance, this user communicates with the game/advertisement web site **308**.

Moreover, it is important to note that at least in one embodiment of the present invention, the advertising selection engine **618** may, for a particular demographic profile, periodically re-evaluate user profiles in the user database **28** for reselecting the group of users to which an advertising presentation is to be presented. Thus, users previously selected may be requalified or disqualified and users previously disqualified may be now qualified for selection due to, for example, an enhanced user profile.

Accordingly, the present invention may commence or cease transmitting a category of advertising to a user whose user profile is enhanced with additional information. For example, if a user indicates that he/she is currently considering the purchase of a new car, then adverting for purchasing a car may be transmitted to the user. Alternatively, once the present invention is notified that, for example, a car has been purchased or that no further car advertising is are desired, then a further enhancement of the user's profile may be performed so that no further advertising from the category of car advertising is transmitted to the user.

Note that the present invention provides for flexibly creating, deleting and modifying categories of advertisements by providing techniques for linking demographic item pairs that are similarly related to a category record or object. Thus, at least the following advertising categories may be provided by the present invention: sports categories (e.g., baseball, soccer, hockey, etc.), food related categories (e.g., restaurants, grocery stores, food items), exercise related advertising (e.g., bicycles, in-line skates, skiing), insurance related advertising (e.g., auto insurance, life insurance), political related advertising (e.g., for or against a particular political candidate), and geographical related advertising (e.g., for users living in a particular area such as the Denver metropolitan area). Thus, the advertising selection engine **618** supplies the selected advertising presentations to the HTML display engine **622** for translating this data so that it may subsequently be included in an HTML output to the user by the common gateway interface **348**.

More precisely, the selected advertisement data is joined in the HTML display engine **622** (at least in one operation of the present invention) with a token **628** representing, for example, a gaming card (for a current user game) that has been issued by the token generator (module) **38**, this generator being an enhanced version of the card generator module **38** of FIG. **3**. The generated token is supplied initially to the game play engine **632** for processing user gaming requests according to the rules of the game being played. That is, the game play engine **632** determines, for each available game: (a) how each token may be "played"; (b) who receives the token, for example, the user or the house playing module **42**; and (c) the result of playing the token. Note that in one embodiment, the token generator **38** generates tokens on request by, for example, the house playing module **42** and/or the player options evaluators **34**, wherein the tokens generated are appropriate to the game being played. Alternatively, in another embodiment, the token generator **38** may generate random tokens and the game play engine **632** transforms the tokens into appropriate randomized values for the games offered, as one skilled in the art will appreciate. Furthermore, other embodiments for supplying randomized tokens to a plurality of different games are within the scope of the present invention. Additionally, the game play engine **632** contacts the player database **28** to maintain the status of the user in relation to the particular game being played as well as the user's relationship to all of the other users (if, for example, the user is involved in a tournament offered at the game/advertisement web site **308**). Note that, as one skilled in the art will appreciate, in one embodiment of the game play engine **632**, its internal modules provide a similar architecture and functionality to the correspondingly labeled modules of FIG. **3**, albeit additionally, for games other than blackjack (e.g., "head-to-head" poker, craps, roulette, and pai gow).

The common gateway interface or CGI scripts **348** transfer data between the HTML display engine **622** and the World Wide Web server **340** which, as one skilled in the art will understand, may be a plurality of high level executable programs as discussed in the description of CGI scripts **348** for FIG. **3**. The World Wide Web server **340**, in turn, transfers the data to the Internet TCP/IP stack **332** that interfaces with the Internet **324** for transferring the data to an intended Internet client node **318** having an appropriate World Wide Web browser **640**.

The present embodiment maintains information on the status of games being played and user responses to advertising in the user database **28**. Moreover, additional advertiser specific information (e.g., desired demographic profiles, advertisements, promotional, and information related to user responses) is provided in the advertiser database **612**. Accordingly, as discussed above, the demographic profiles in the advertiser database **612** may include schemas or templates having fields for designating one or more of the attributes (8.1) through (8.11). Moreover, the databases **28** and **612** may maintain records of various types of pertinent statistics such as: (a) the advertising presentations presented to each user; (b) the time, date and number of presentations of a particular advertising presentation; and (c) the detected user responses to the advertising. Thus, this information may provide advertisers or sponsors with enhanced feedback as to the efficacy of their products, services and presentations thereof. For example, an advertiser may be able to query the user and advertiser databases **28** and **612** to obtain such feedback as:

(9.1) who has seen a particular advertisement;
(9.2) when it was seen;
(9.3) the number of times the advertisement was accessed:
  (a) by any particular user;
  (b) by all users; and
(9.4) the number of favorable and/or unfavorable responses.

Referring now to FIG. **7**, a diagram is presented providing one embodiment of the access routes or paths users navigate in accessing the features of the game/advertisement web site **308**. In particular, upon initiating Internet contact with the game/advertisement web site **308**, a user is first presented with the opening page **700** identifying the web site **308**. Subsequently, the user can access the benefits and registration pages **704** for viewing general information related to web site **308** and also for registering at the web site (as is discussed in further detail below). Alternatively, the user may access one or more "Lobby" pages **708** to view the gaming and information exchange capabilities as, for example, provided by advertisers. Assuming the user is registered at the game/advertisement web site **308**, the user may proceed from the LOBBY **708** to the game page **710**, wherein a game **726** or game rules **730** can be selected for playing, via the introduction to game pages **728**. Alternatively, the user may instead access one or more index pages **714** having, for example, listings of organizations to which the user may be allowed to access depending on the affiliations of the user (e.g., a member of a particular membership discount store chain). Additionally, from the index page(s) **714** substantially any user may access an advertisement or promotional provided by an advertiser on an advertiser page(s) **722**. However, it is an aspect of the present invention that information related to certain promotionals provided by advertisers or sponsors are restricted. That is, such promotionals may be only presented to users having a demographic Drofile that has been determined by the present invention to be sufficiently compatible with a desired user profile for the advertiser or sponsor to warrant providing such a promotional. Thus, the present invention provides access to certain advertiser promotionals only to "qualified" users who are, for example, considered likely subsequent purchasers of the advertiser's products and/or services. Additionally, such promotionals may also be presented to users who express an interest in a particular product or service advertised. For example, users who (a) request additional or supplemental information related to an advertised item, or (b) provide a favorable response to such advertising (by, for instance, indicating a preference for an advertised item), or (c) respond to a questionnaire related to personal information or marketing survey information may also be provided with information regarding promotionals. Thus, advertisers or sponsors may offer relatively substantial or expensive promotionals via the present invention to such users as well. Moreover, the present invention may also utilize such demographic profiles to prohibit a user not sufficiently matching such a demographic profile from gaining access to a corresponding promotional. Accordingly, in one embodiment of the present invention, when the user accesses an advertiser page **722**, the user's profile (in the user database **28**) is compared with the demographic profiles in the advertiser data base **612** for determining any promotionals that can be presented to the user.

Moreover, from the index page **714** the user may be provided with the ability to link into various web sites or web site pages. That is, the user may be provided with the ability to link into another web site or web page at any time a link is made available (typically a hypertext link). Additionally, note that similar links may be accessible by users while playing a game **726**. However, these links may generally hyperlink the user to an advertiser page **722** within the game/advertisement web site **308** so that the user may be exposed to further information and/or presented with promotional options for an advertised item. For instance, certain advertising hyperlinks may be integrated into the presentation of plays of a game **726**. Accordingly, since an aspect of the present invention is to repeatedly integrate different advertising presentations (and any related hyperlinks) into the play of a game **726**, a user may repeatedly be enticed to seek out additional information about different products or services by activating the related hyperlinks. Moreover, it is also an aspect of the present invention that when such hyperlinks provide the user with access to a different web site, that at least a portion of the display of the user's Internet client node **318** maintains a graphical format associated with the game/advertisement web site **308**, and that the user may leave and return to the web site **308** without the user being aware of accessing another web site. Moreover, by monitoring user input related to an advertising presentation, the present invention is able to provide feedback to an advertiser as to, for example, the number of times the advertising presentation is accessed by users for such additional information about products or services.

Also note that some advertisements (presented via advertiser pages **722** or as part of a game play presentation) may be interactive with the user wherein the user may perform a transaction such as making a reservation (e.g., an airline or hotel reservation). Further, a user may be given the opportunity to provide positive and negative opinions or responses on, for example, various advertisements, promotionals and other related matters by expressing such responses upon accessing advertisement related information. Thus, it is an aspect of the present invention to be able to conduct "test marketing" in that statistically representative groups of users may be selected for determining:

(10.1) the efficacy or appeal of one advertisement in comparison to another advertisement for a particular advertised item;

(10.2) the profile of the users that are responsive to a particular advertising presentation; and/or

(10.3) whether a particular group of users, for example, having similar user profiles favorably respond to a particular advertising presentation. For example, the present invention may determine such a response: (a) by detecting an activation of a hyperlink, (b) by detecting a response to questions presented, and/or (c) by determining the length of time the advertising presentation is displayed or visible.

Accordingly, input response data may be transmitted to the game/advertisement web site **308** and retained for subsequent statistical evaluation. Thus, resulting aggregate statistics can be made available to, for example, advertisers or sponsors, thereby preserving the privacy of the users. In particular, statistics may be made available for:

(11.1) providing information about, for example, the efficacy of certain advertising presentations (e.g., the number of positive responses to such presentations and/or the number of advertised items sold directly through the advertisements at the game/advertisement web site **308**);

(11.2) providing information related to the number and profile of users accessing certain advertising presentations;

(11.3): determining measurements related to the number of different (groups of) users to which an advertising presentation has been presented;

(11.4) determining the total number of presentations of a particular advertisement;

(11.5) determining the cost of advertising presentations to the advertisers and billing the advertisers for such costs according to, for example, at least one of: (a) the number of users to which an is presented, (b) the number of promotionals requested or (c) the number of network user communications (i.e., hits) with the web site **308**;

(11.6) determining if an advertising presentation should be discontinued because the advertiser's cost limits have been reached, such limits being, for example, related to a total number of presentations of an advertising presentation. Note that, in one embodiment, it is an aspect of the present invention to charge an advertiser for each presentation to a user; or

(11.7) determining which of an advertising presentation and a different second advertising presentation (from the same advertiser) is most effective when both are provided to various selected (groups of) users, so that the advertiser or sponsor may then have a basis for choosing the most appropriate of the two advertising presentations in future advertising.

Additionally, it is an aspect of the present invention that it may also maintain statistics (and/or related information) for:

(12.1) providing "real time" game rankings of users (players) involved in a gaming tournament provided by the game/advertisement web site **308**. Note that such rankings may be provided to a user so that he/she may know his/her standing and the number of players remaining in the tournament; and

(12.2) providing a "style of personality" of the game playing users so that, for example, a risk tolerance of such users may be estimated and used to determine if a particular user might be interested in a particular product or service. Thus, such "style of personality" statistics for a user may be stored in the user's profile. For example, the information captured here may include: average size of wager, average size of wager in comparison to the total amount that could be wagered, length of time playing in a single session, the ratio of the number of wagers on high risk plays presented, and the skill of the player.

Accordingly, the following aspects of the present invention are noteworthy:

(13.1) the user may be provided with free access or reduced cost access to other areas of the Internet **324** upon viewing the presentations of certain organizations and/or advertisers. Note that the ability to reduce the cost of accessing the Internet may act as a vehicle for attracting various users;

(13.2) the index page **714** gives a user the opportunity to access a particular organization (e.g., organizations **718**) that the user may belong to or any particular advertiser (e.g., advertisers **722**) without going through any games although the user may be required to go through the "LOBBY" page(s) **708** and thereby be exposed to advertising and/or the opportunity to join a game;

(13.3) a user may also be able to go from an initial organization page **718** to an introductory game page **728** (e.g., for a game **726**) but, unless authorized, may not be provided with further access to the organization's web pages or the game;

(13.4) while playing a game **726**, the user has the ability to access further information related to an advertisement or promotional being presented;

(13.5) during the playing of a game **726** (e.g., blackjack), the user may be allowed to review and/or stepwise replay a previous portion of a game **726** during a current gaming session;

(13.6) when in a particular organization page **718**, the user may be required to return to the index page **714** before linking into an advertiser **722** unless a direct link has been provided for some reason on the particular organization web page. Moreover, the user may access the game page **710** from the index page **714** and vice versa;

(13.7) a user may either go directly into playing a particular game **726** (as authorized) or to a rules section

730 for reviewing the rules for the corresponding game **726**. Note that a user may always access the rules section **730** during the corresponding game **726**;

(13.8) there is a help feature for providing information such as:

a) how to do some particular action or the reason for some action or the reason an action is blocked. For example, the reason for an inability to access a certain web page, the reason for an inability to make a particular game play, such as a bet, stand or hit in the game of blackjack and/or the reason for a particular result of a certain bet, hit, stand or other user play in a game such as blackjack;

b) for contacting a gaming referee for resolving gaming conflicts. Such a referee will be available to resolve any dispute. Note that the user can notify the management operating the present invention of a problem via, for example, notification forms displayed when a notification button is activated.

Referring now to an alternative embodiment of the present invention presented in FIG. **8**, wherein the game/advertisement web site **308** coordinates with a third party Internet access service provider **810** (or interactive cable television provider) for providing Internet **324** (cable television) access to users on a reduced cost or free basis once a user has registered with the web server **340** (cable television provider). That is, the game/advertisement web site **308** contacts the user's Internet service provider **810** and arranges to subsidize the user's Internet service charges in return for the gaming advertisement web site **308** being able to repeatedly download to the user's Internet client node **318** (or alternatively, interactive cable television node), unrequested information such as advertising for presentation to the user.

Accordingly, a prospective user of the present invention can sign up or register with the game/advertisement web site **308** for reduced Internet service fees by dialing into an Internet service provider **810** with normal serial dialing and after gaining Internet access, subsequently log on to the web site **308** as a user identified by the generic user identifier "NEW." Each user identified by "NEW" is forced into a connection with an enrollment or registration program so he/she can provide information requested by the present invention that can subsequently be used in determining which advertising to present to this user according to, for example, advertiser preferences. Thus, when registration is completed, the present embodiment of the invention downloads, for example, an ad viewer program **812** and a communications daemon (e.g., ad receiver daemon **806**) to the user's Internet client node **318**, wherein this daemon allows the game/advertisement web site **308** to download to the user's Internet client node **318** unrequested information such as advertising repeatedly. Accordingly, assuming the daemon **806** is installed, the user may access not only the gaming and advertisement services of the web site **308**, but also access substantially the entire Internet through the web site **308** at a reduced cost. Thus, whenever the end user processor **318** connects with the Internet service provider **810**, the game/advertisement web site **308** is alerted by the Internet service provider **810** and the DISPLAY ENGINE **622** starts up the downloaded daemon **806** via Internet communications with the user's Internet client node **318**. Subsequently, the DISPLAY ENGINE **622** periodically sends selected advertising to the daemon **806**. Accordingly, the daemon **806** utilizes the ad viewer program **812** to coordinate the display of the advertising presentation.

Note that various alternative embodiments related to the architecture and functionality of FIG. **8** are also within the scope of the present invention. For example, instead of communicating with a plurality of third-party Internet service providers **806** for determining when users registered with the present invention are accessing the Internet via subsidized Internet connections, the game/advertisement web site **308** may include or be related to a dedicated Internet service provider **806** so that when a user registers with the present invention, the user is provided with a new Internet access code for the dedicated Internet service provider **806** and the user's Internet access fees may be subsidized.

However, regardless of how the present invention subsidizes Internet access, the game/advertisement controller **604** is notified whenever each subsidized user connects to the Internet or disconnects from the Internet. Additionally, certain reliability features are included in the daemon **806** and ad view program **812** for assuring that advertising is indeed presented to the user. For example, there may be periodic transmissions from each subsidized user's Internet client node **318** to the web site **308** verifying that both the daemon **806** and the ad view program **812** are active. Note that whenever any advertising is received at the user's Internet client node **318**, the daemon **806** transfers the advertising to the ad viewer program **812** which, in turn, converts the transmitted information to a displayable format and forces the display of the user's Internet client node **318** to present the advertising unobscured to the user.

Additionally, note that in certain contexts the DISPLAY ENGINE **622** may transmit a message to an Internet Service Provider **806** indicating that no further Internet access will be subsidized due to a predetermined number of advertising presentation display failures.

An additional and/or alternative description of the embodiment of the present invention shown in FIGS. **8A** and **8B** is as follows: users may use the present invention to access the INTERNET **324** on a reduced cost or free basis, by using whatever TCP/IP SLIP/PPP package they desire and registering with the web server **308**. That is, a user can sign up or register by dialing into a terminal server with normal serial dialing and log on as a user identified by the identifier "NEW." User "NEW" is then forced into a connection to an enrollment or registration program so he/she can provide information requested by the present invention. When enrollment is completed, the present invention allows the user to download a communications daemon (e.g., ad receiver daemon **806**) to the user's Internet client node **318**. The user may then install the daemon on their machine (Internet client node **318**) and dial-up with their favorite TCP/IP package.

However, upon accessing the host **308**, the user accesses basic functionality of the DISPLAY ENGINE **622** that starts up the downloaded daemon **806**. The network host **308** periodically queries each active port on the terminal servers (e.g, Internet client node **318**) to get the IP address and then send a short message to the daemon **806** which is listening in on a specific port. The DISPLAY ENGINE **622** may also disable access by an end user machine **318** after a certain number of failures.

Note that the host **308** periodically sends an item to the downloaded daemon **806** to display. The daemon then displays the message (advertisement) in a window (of the WWW browser **640**) on the user's screen.

In another embodiment of the present invention, game tournaments may be provided, wherein the players of such a tournament play instances of a game on a communications network such as the Internet, a cable network, an interactive television network, or an intranet (such as in a casino). Such game tournaments provide for the playing of a plurality of instances of a game by each of a plurality of players. In general, a tournament is a multi-level structure, wherein at a first level players are grouped within the tournament into groups and the players within a group compete against one another when playing one or more instances of the game. At a higher level of the tournament, winning players from a lower level (e.g., the first level hereinabove) are partitioned into one or more groups such that for each of these new groups, the players within the group compete against one another by playing instances of the game, or, alternatively, by playing instances of a modified version wherein one or more rules of the game are changed (such as described hereinabove when discussing blackjack).

Below is a brief itemization of some of the novel tournament aspects of the present invention.

1. The participants usually register by identifying themselves in such fashion so that they may be recognized by those managing the tournament and/or the other participants as participating members of the tournament.
   a. The participants need not register by responding to all identification questions at one time that may be provided, but instead may respond to a few questions submitted at various times while the tournament is in progress.
2. Keeping score is performed by using a numeric indication, tokens, chips, or another indication of the number of credits acquired by each participant in the tournament.
3. There are game rules set forth by which the participants acquire or lose their credits for each game involved in the tournament.
   a. An objective by which a participant wins a tournament depends upon the participants acquiring or losing their credits within the rules of each tournament.
      i. The participants usually have the ability to access their scores and determine their ranking in the round or tournament they are in.
      ii. The participants may be placed into various groups wherein they operate under different rules from the other participants depending upon the group to which they were assigned.
   b. Dice, cards or other objects may be used during the game to determine the winner(s).
   c. The methods by which the tournament is operated may include a plurality of rounds in which the participants are divided into groups and the participants in each round compete against other participants in the round to determine the winner of the round.
      i. A winner(s) is similarly chosen from each round until a winner(s) is determined to be the winner(s) of the tournament.
      ii. The rounds may vary in number and size, but usually, although not necessarily, each round consists of fewer participants since only the winner(s) of each round advance into the next and final rounds.
         (1) There may be situations in which the rules may allow one or more persons who have not participated in an earlier round to be placed into an advanced round.
   d. The participants may or may not be questioned about their personal preferences, beliefs or attitude during the tournament, which responses may be placed into a data base for further questions or qualify them to be involved in other rounds or other aspects of the tournament. Note this aspect of the invention is similar to previous embodiments of the invention described hereinabove regarding advertising during the playing of a game.
   e. The tournament may or may not include a "sudden death" or special round containing special rules for winning that differ from the rules for the tournament leading up to the special round.
   f. The game rules may allow additional participants to enter the tournament after many of the other participants have qualified to be placed into an advance round by obtaining a special score that may be related to the scores of those who did advance or by complying and satisfying any other such special rules that may allow a participant to qualify to play in a tournament that is in progress and in which most or many of the other participants are playing in an advanced round of the tournament.
   g. The rules may provide for a tournament within a tournament in which special rules may qualify the participants to play in and/or win a tournament which relates in some fashion to the participants and rules of another tournament that is already in progress.
      i. The rules may provide for a tournament within a tournament within a tournament in the same fashion as set forth above.
      ii. The participants may be designated as a part of a particular group wherein the success of one of the participants determines the success of the other participants in the group.
      iii. The participants may or may not have the ability to delete themselves or to be deleted and moved from one such group to another group within the tournament(s).

The foregoing discussion of the invention has been presented for purposes of illustration and description. Further, the description is not intended to limit the invention to the form disclosed herein. Consequently, variation and modification commiserate with the above teachings, within the skill and knowledge of the relevant art, are within the scope of the present invention. The embodiment described hereinabove is further intended to explain the best mode presently known of practicing the invention and to enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention as such, or in other embodiments, and with the various modifications required by their particular application or uses of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method of playing game instances on the Internet, comprising:

first receiving player identification at a game playing Internet accessible node (GPIAN) for first and second players;

transmitting, via the Internet, from the GPIAN, first information related to communications between: (a) the GPIAN, and (b) a first Internet accessible node from which the first player communicates with the GPIAN;

wherein said first information is utilized in subsequent Internet communications between the GPIAN and the first Internet accessible node;

wherein said first information is stored on the first Internet accessible node so that it is available in subsequent different Internet connections by the first player;

second receiving, via the Internet, at the GPIAN, first responsive information indicative of said first information being present on said first Internet accessible node;

first playing with the first player a first instance of a game, wherein one or more game play representations are transmitted to the first player via the first Internet accessible node;

second playing with the second player a second instance of a game, wherein one or more game play representations are transmitted to the second player and from the GPIAN while the first player is playing the first instance;

transmitting to at least one of the first and second players, respectively, during one of said first and second games instances, a presentation substantially unrelated to plays of the one game instance, wherein said presentation is advertising a product or service;

wherein said step of second receiving at the GPIAN occurs when the first player has reconnected the first Internet accessible node to the Internet after said first information has been stored on the first Internet accessible node and said first Internet accessible node has disconnected from the Internet.

2. The method of claim **1**, further comprising the following steps:

identifying at least one of the first and second players as requesting to join one of one or more game tournaments, wherein each tournament includes a plurality of instances of a game for playing by each of the players identified, wherein for each of the players, at least one of the following (a) and (b) must be satisfied for the player to complete one of the tournaments:

(a) a predetermined number of instances of the game must be played by the player;

(b) a predetermined amount of time must elapse between the commencement of the tournament and the termination of the tournament;

for each tournament, the following steps are performed:

(A1) selecting the identified players to be included in the tournament;

(A2) grouping the players into groups, wherein for each group, the players therein compete against one another in playing instances of the game;

(A3) determining one or more winning players for each group;

(A4) establishing a modified version of the game by changing a rule of the game while retaining another rule for the game;

(A5) combining the winning players from different groups into one or more new groups for competing against one another in playing instances of the modified version of the game.

3. The method as claimed in claim **1** further including:

for the first player, the following steps are performed:

(A) receiving, from the GPIAN via the Internet, one or more interactive game presentations for presenting on at least a portion of a display for the first Internet accessible node, and wherein said interactive game presentations are interactive, via the Internet, between the first player and said GPIAN;

(B) providing, to the first Internet accessible node, concurrently with at least one of the interactive game presentations, said advertising presentation;

(C) providing to the first player over time, one or more additional advertising presentations, each said additional advertising presentation for providing information related to one of a product and a service;

(D) receiving, via the Internet, data indicative of an action by the first player in response to one of said first and said additional advertising presentations, wherein said data is transmitted:

(i) from said first Internet accessible node, and

(ii) to a destination node of the Internet, said destination node identified at said first Internet accessible node by a destination Internet address used for transmitting said data;

(E) transmitting to the first player, via the Internet, another presentation for presenting to the first player at said first Internet accessible node, wherein said another presentation is responsive to said step (D).

4. The method of claim **1**, further including:

(a) periodically transmitting one of said additional advertising presentations to said first Internet accessible node;

(b) forcing a display of at least one of said presentation and said additional advertising presentations to be exposed on a display at said first Internet accessible node;

(c) transmitting further information to said first Internet accessible node, said further information related to the product or service of the advertising presentation;

(d) presenting said advertising presentation on said first Internet accessible node, wherein at least a portion of a display maintains a graphical format displayed prior to said present step of presenting.

5. The method of claim **1**, further

generating first and second sequences of electronic card representations, respectively, for playing the first game and the second game;

wherein said first and second sequences have at least different card representations in at least one identical card representation position, in each of said first and second sequences.

6. The method of claim **1**, wherein further including comparing a requested wager by the first player with an acceptable wager limit.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein said first and second players play their games via differently addressed Internet nodes for accessing said GPIAN.

8. The method as claimed in claim **7**, wherein said first information includes executable instructions for receiving advertisement information via the network.

9. The method of claim **7**, wherein said step of transmitting includes transmitting from one of: a World Wide Web server and an Internet interface.

10. The method as claimed in claim **7**, further including repeatedly performing the following steps:

determining, for at least one of said first and second players, a corresponding opponent's play that is responsive to a play made by the at least one player, and presenting, via a transmission on the network, a presentation of the corresponding opponent's play to the at least one player.

11. The method as claimed in claim **10**, wherein said opponent's play is determined without manual intervention during said opponent's play.

12. A method of playing a game on a communications network, comprising:

first receiving player identification, for first and second players, at a game playing network accessible node (GPNAN);

transmitting, via the network, from the (GPNAN, first information related to communications between: (a1) the GPNAN, and (a2) a first network accessible node from which the first player communicates with the GPNAN;

wherein said first information is utilized in subsequent network communications between the GPNAN and the first network accessible node, and wherein said first information is stored on the first network accessible node so that it is available in a subsequent different network connection by the first player;

second receiving at the GPNAN, via the network, first responsive information indicative of said first information being present on said first network accessible node;

using, by the GPNAN, said first responsive information for one or more of (b1) providing the first player with access to a service offered by the GPNAN, (b2) determining that a network transmission received at the first network accessible node will be processed in a predetermined expected manner, and (b3) determining that the first network accessible node has a predetermined program element available;

first playing, with the first player, a first game instance of a game, wherein one or more corresponding game play representations of the first game instance are transmitted from the GPNAN to the first player via the first network accessible node, wherein for at least most game plays by the first player, there is a responsive game play transmission on the network by the GPNAN;

second playing with the second player a second game instance of a game, wherein one or more corresponding game play representations of the second game instance are transmitted from the GPNAN to a second network accessible node for presenting the game play representations of the second game instance to the second player, wherein the game play representations of the second game instance are transmitted to the second network accessible node while the first player is playing the first game instance;

transmitting by the GPNAN to at least the first player, additional information on the network, wherein said transmitting of said additional information has, as a consequence, a display of an advertising presentation on said first network accessible node, said display occurring concurrently with a display of one of the corresponding game play representations for playing the first game instance, said advertising presentation presenting advertising related to a purchase of a product or service;

wherein said step of second receiving at the GPNAN occurs when the first player has reconnected the first network accessible node to the network after (i) and (ii) following: (i) said first information has been stored on the first network accessible node, and (ii) said first network accessible node has disconnected from the network.

13. The method of claim **12**, wherein said additional information is transmitted during the playing of said first game instance.

14. The method of claim **13**, wherein said additional information is transmitted in a different network transmission from the transmission of the one corresponding game play representation.

15. The method of claim **15**, wherein said display of the advertising being made visible to the first player is not a response from an immediately previous input by the first player.

16. The method of claim **13**, wherein said additional information is transmitted concurrently with a response from the GPNAN to a game play transmission by the first player.

17. The method of claim **13**, wherein said advertising presentation accepts an input from the first player for presenting further information on the first network accessible node.

18. The method of claim **12**, further including a step of selecting said advertising presentation using a result from comparing information about the first player with information related to said advertising presentation.

19. The method of claim **18**, wherein said information related to said advertising presentation includes profile information for identifying a player to which said advertising presentation is to be presented.

20. The method of claim **18**, wherein said step of selecting includes:

accessing personal information about the first player; and

using said personal information for identifying said advertising presentation (AD), wherein said personal information includes data satisfying a predetermined criteria corresponding to the AD.

21. The method of claim **12**, wherein said advertising presentation changes from a first display to a second display of another advertising presentation without there being an intervening input by the first player.

22. The method of claim **21**, wherein said step of transmitting results in, periodically, an advertising presentation currently being displayed at the first network accessible node being replaced by a display of a different advertising presentation.

23. The method of claim **21**, wherein said advertising presentation does not affect a change in playing the first game instance.

24. The method of claim **21**, wherein at least one of said advertising presentation and said another advertising presentation is capable of receiving an input from the the first player for requesting additional advertising information.

25. The method of claim **12**, wherein for at least most game plays by the second player, there is a responsive game play transmission on the network by the GPNAN.

26. The method of claim **12**, wherein said step of using includes determining whether a program element downloaded in response to an input by the first player to the GPNAN is properly performing.

27. The method of claim **12**, wherein at least one of said steps of claim **12** includes a step of the GPNAN communicating on the network with an Internet Protocol.

28. The method of claim **12**, wherein the second player plays the second game at a second network accessible node that has a different network identification from the first network accessible node.

29. The method as claimed in claim **12**, further including a step of:

outputting, from the GPNAN, a network transmission (T) to the second player, wherein as a consequence of T, at least one interactive advertising presentation is presented to the second player.

30. The method of claim **29** further including providing to the second player over time, one or more additional outputs from the GPNAN, wherein as a consequence of said one or more additional outputs, one or more additional advertising presentations are presented to the second player, each said additional advertising presentation for providing information related to one of a product and a service.

31. The method of claim **29**, further including a step of:

third receiving, via the network, data indicative of an action by the second player in response to said at least one interactive advertising presentation and said additional advertising presentations, wherein said data is transmitted:

(i) from said second network accessible node, and

(ii) to a destination node of the network, said destination node identified at said second network accessible node by a destination network address used for transmitting said data.

32. The method of claim **31**, further including a step of:

transmitting to the second player, via the network, another presentation for presenting to the player at said second network accessible node, wherein said another presentation is responsive to said third receiving step.

33. The method of claim **12**, wherein the first and second games are card games.

34. The method of claim **33**, wherein said step of first playing includes transmitting a sequence of card representations from the GPNAN to the first player for playing said first game, wherein said sequence is not transmitted by the GPNAN to the second player for playing said second game.

35. The method of claim **34**, wherein said step of second playing includes transmitting a sequence of card representations from the GPNAN to the second player for playing said second game, wherein said sequence is not transmitted by the GPNAN to the first player for playing said first game.

36. The method as claimed in claim **33**, further including a step of transmitting a dealer's card hand in each of said first and second games.

37. The method as claimed in claim **12**, wherein for the first and second games, and a probability of said first and second players each receiving an identical sequence of game play configurations is substantially equal to chance.

38. The method of claim **12**, wherein for substantially every play of said first game by the first player there is a corresponding transmission on the network between said GPNAN and said first player, wherein said corresponding transmission occurs prior to a subsequent game play by the first player in said first game.

39. The method of claim **38**, wherein for substantially every play of said second game by the second player, there is a corresponding transmission on the network between said GPNAN and said second player, wherein said corresponding transmission occurs prior to a subsequent game play by the second player in said second game.

40. The method of claim **12**, further including transmitting, via the network, from the GPNAN, second information related to communications between: (a) the GPNAN, and (b) the second network accessible node, wherein said second information is utilized in subsequent network communications between the GPNAN and the second network accessible node, and wherein said second information is stored on the second network accessible node so that it is available in subsequent different network connections by the second player.

41. The method of claim **40**, wherein said second information includes executable instructions for receiving advertisement information via the network.

42. The method as claimed in claim **12**, further including a step of maintaining a status of each of said first and second games so that each of said first and second games are played with a same effect as if the other of said first and second games were not being played.

43. The method as claimed in claim **12**, further including a step of selecting the advertising presentation using personal information supplied by the first player.

44. The method of claim **12**, further including a step of providing to the first player a ranking of another player that plays a game with the GPNAN, wherein said ranking is used to determine a prize for at least one of the players being ranked.

45. The method of claim **12**, wherein said step of first playing includes accessing the network at one of: a reduced network charge, and free of charge.

46. The method as claimed in claim **12**, wherein said step of first playing includes storing a current configuration of said first game, and accessing said current configuration using player identification data provided with a game play request received from the first player.

47. The method as claimed in claim **12**, further including a step of receiving a wager request from the first player via a transmission on the network, and determining whether the wager request is acceptable.

48. The method of claim **12**, wherein one or more of said steps of first and second playing include providing one or more Internet transmissions, cable television transmissions, and local area network transmissions to one of the first and second players playing, respectively, the first and second games.

49. The method of claim **12**, further including playing of a third game between said GPIAN and the second player, wherein a third collection of one or more game play representations is transmitted to the second player, and wherein the transmissions of the game play representations for the third collection and the first collection overlap in time.

50. The method of claim **12**, further comprising the following steps:

identifying at least one of the first and second players as requesting to join one of one or more game tournaments, wherein each tournament includes a plurality of instances of a game for playing by each of the players identified, wherein for each of the players, at least one of the following (a) and (b) must be satisfied for the player to complete one of the tournaments:

(a) a predetermined number of instances of the game must be played by the player;

(b) a predetermined amount of time must elapse between the commencement of the tournament and the termination of the tournament;

for each tournament, the following steps are performed:

(A1) selecting the identified players to be included in the tournament;

(A2) grouping the players into groups, wherein for each group, the players therein compete against one another in playing instances of the game; and

(A3) determining one or more winning players for each group.

51. The method of claim **50**, further including for at least one of the tournaments:

establishing a modified version of the game by changing a rule of the game while retaining another rule for the game; and

combining the winning players from different groups into one or more new groups for competing against one another in playing instances of the modified version of the game.

52. An apparatus for playing a game on a communications network, comprising:

a store for storing player identification, for first and second players, said store accessible by a game playing network accessible node (GPNAN);

a network interface for transmitting, via the network, from the GPNAN, first information related to communications between: (a1) the GPNAN, and (a2) a first network accessible node from which the first player communicates with the GPNAN;

wherein said first information is utilized in subsequent network communications between the GPNAN and the first network accessible node, and wherein said first information is stored on the first network accessible node so that it is available in a subsequent different network connection by the first player;

wherein said network interface receives, via the network, first responsive information indicative of said first information being present on said first network accessible node;

wherein said first responsive information is used for one or more of: (b1) providing the first player with access to a service offered by the GPNAN, (b2) determining that a network transmission received at the first network accessible node will be processed in a predetermined expected manner, and (b3) determining that the first network accessible node has a predetermined program element available;

a game controller for playing a first game instance of a game with the first player, wherein one or more corresponding game play representations of the first game instance are transmitted from the GPNAN to the first player via the first network accessible node, wherein for at least most game plays by the first player, there is a responsive game play transmission on the network by the GPNAN;

wherein said game controller plays a second game instance of a game with the second player, wherein, one or more corresponding game play representations of the second game instance are transmitted from the GPNAN to a second network accessible node for presenting the game play representations of the second game instance to the second player, wherein the game play representations of the second game instance are transmitted to the second network accessible node while the first player is playing the first game instance;

one or more programmatic elements for combining advertising related information with game playing information to obtain a resulting combination that is in a format: (a) acceptable for being transmitted on the network by the GPNAN to at least the first player, and (b) processed by the first network accessible node so that, as a consequence of such processing, a display of an advertising presentation on said first network accessible node is provided, said display occurring concurrently with a display of one of the corresponding game play representations for playing the first game instance, said advertising presentation presenting advertising related to a purchase of a product or service;

wherein said GPNAN receives said first responsive information for identifying the first player, and said GPNAN receives said first responsive information when the first player has reconnected the first network accessible node to the network after (i) and (ii) following: (i) said first information has been stored on the first network accessible node, and (ii) said first network accessible node has disconnected from the network.

53. An apparatus for a service on a communications network, comprising:

a store for storing user identification, for first and second users, said store accessible by a service providing network accessible node (SPNAN);

a network interface for transmitting, via the network, from the SPNAN, first information related to communications between: (a1) the SPNAN, and (a2) a first network accessible node from which the first user communicates with the SPNAN;

wherein said first information is utilized in subsequent network communications between the SPNAN and the first network accessible node, and wherein said first information is stored on the first network accessible node so that it is available in a subsequent different network connection by the first user;

wherein said network interface receives, via the network, first responsive information indicative of said first information being present on said first network accessible node;

wherein said first responsive information is used for one or more of: (b1) providing the first user with access to a service offered by the SPNAN, (b2) determining that a network transmission received at the first network accessible node will be processed in a predetermined expected manner, and (b3) determining that the first network accessible node has a predetermined program element available;

a controller for providing access to an instance of a first service to the first user, wherein one or more corresponding service display representations of the first service are transmitted from the SPNAN to the first user via the first network accessible node, wherein at least most of the service display representations are interactive with the first user for providing corresponding responsive transmissions on the network via the SPNAN during the instance of the first service;

wherein said SPNAN provides a second instance of a service with the second user, wherein one or more corresponding service representations for the second instance are transmitted from the SPNAN to a second network accessible node for presenting the service representations of the second instance to the second user, wherein the service representations of the second instance are transmitted to the second network accessible node while the first user is interacting with the instance of the first service;

one or more programmatic elements for combining advertising related information with service related information to obtain a resulting combination that is in a format: (a) acceptable for being transmitted on the network by the SPNAN to at least the first user, and (b) processed by the first network accessible node so that, as a consequence of such processing, a display of an advertising presentation corresponding to said advertising information is provided on said first network accessible node, said display occurring concurrently with a display of one of the corresponding service representations for the instance of the first service, said advertising presentation presenting advertising related to a purchase of a product or service;

wherein said SPNAN receives said first responsive information for identifying the first user, and said SPNAN receives said first responsive information when the first user has reconnected the first network accessible node to the network after (i) and (ii) following: (i) said first information has been stored on the first network accessible node, and (ii) said first network accessible node has disconnected from the network.

54. The method as claimed in claim **53**, wherein when the network is the Internet, each of the instance of the first service and the second instance is one or more of:

(a) a game; and

(b) substantially any interactive service available on the Internet through an Internet service provider by which the user accesses the Internet, such that when the user connects to the Internet, said Internet service provider provides a communication to a predetermined website that subsequently transmits said said advertising information to said first network accessible node.

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